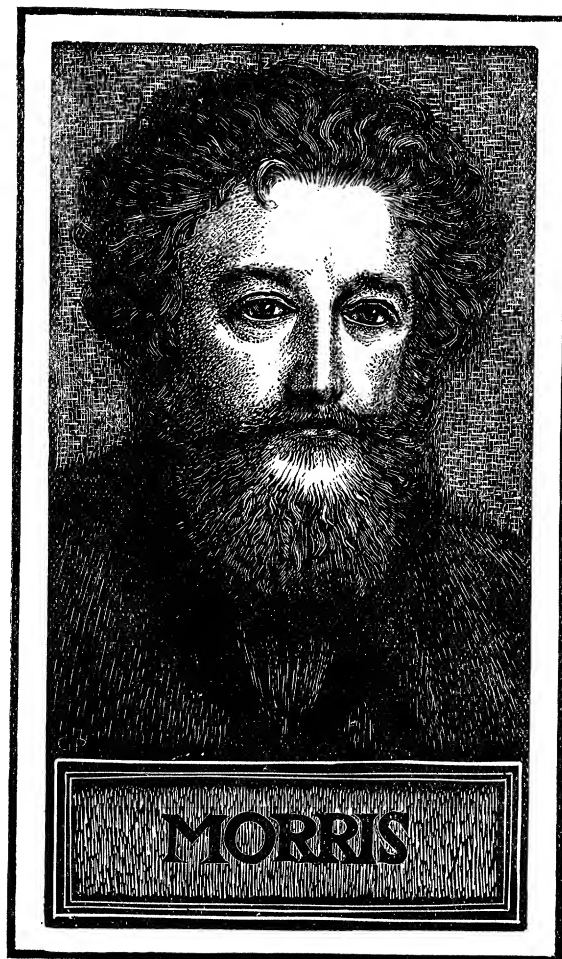

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WILLIAM MORRIS

SELECTED & EDITED BY
HENRY NEWBOLT



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INTRODUCTION

WILLIAM MORRIS was born in 1834 at Walthamstow, the son of a prosperous broker in the city of London. He was educated at Marlborough and at Exeter College, Oxford, where he was an intimate friend of Burne Jones and other members of the Pre-Raphaelite school. His first intention was to take holy orders, but on leaving the university he studied architecture and painting, and in 1862 founded a company to embody his views of decorative art in the production of objects of household use. This remained throughout life his chief occupation, and he produced examples of tapestry, carpet weaving, wall-papers, furniture, and glass which profoundly altered the taste of his age. In 1871 he settled at the old manor-house of Kelmscott, on the upper Thames which was to be his chief home. Later he took up printing, and from the Kelmscott Press issued many volumes which set a new standard in patient and loving craftsmanship. During the 'eighties his interest in politics made him a leader of the Socialist movement, but his ideals were not of the kind to find acceptance in the market-place; and though his inspiration was a potent force with generous minds, he was not fitted for the wary task of political organization. He died in the autumn of 1896, and was followed to his grave in Kelmscott churchyard by the workmen and students to whom he had been an adored master.

Few figures more attractive and more individual are to be met with in literary history. He had a noble courage, untiring industry, zest for a thousand things in life, and a constant tenderness for weakness and suffering. But his humanity was not of the quickly communicable sort which is needed in the life of action ; and though he led a busy practical existence its true stages are to be found in his mind. Swinburne once said of him acutely that he was always more really inspired by literature than by life. In essence he was first a dreamer and then a craftsman ; he walked steadfastly all his days in the direction of his dreams, and his many crafts were only broken lights from the fire of idealism which he nourished within him. Letters were the chief of his crafts, and amid his many businesses he found time for the production of a great mass of verse and prose. Here we are concerned with him chiefly as a poet. At the age of twenty-four he published *The Defence of Guenevere*, the finest fruit of that looking back upon mediævalism which was then the Oxford fashion. In 1867 came *The Life and Death of Jason*, the story of the Golden Fleece. The invocation is addressed to Chaucer, and there is some attempt at the Chaucerian manner. *The Earthly Paradise* appeared in four volumes between 1868 and 1870—twenty-four tales, half from classical and half from romantic sources, told in a strange land in the West where Northern adventurers find a forgotten colony of Greece. In 1873 he published *Love is Enough*, an elaborately constructed mystery play, and two years later a verse translation of the *Æneid*. Meantime he had found a new inspiration in the Icelandic sagas, and his *Sigurd the Volsung*, which appeared in 1876, retold one of

the greatest of the world's stories in splendid anapæsts. The saga influence was exemplified in the series of prose translations and prose tales which followed. The remainder of his poetic achievement is to be found in his translations of the *Odyssey* and of *Beowulf*, in his *Poems by the Way* (1891), and in the stirring songs which he wrote for his Socialist comrades.

Morris's poetry seems to fall into three classes. First in time, and first, too, in perfection of form, come the pieces in *The Defence of Guenevere*. That book inaugurated an epoch, as much as did the *Lyrical Ballads*. None of his contemporaries or immediate successors so pierced to the heart of the Middle Ages—not Rossetti, whose talent was Romanesque, nor Swinburne, who was more Greek than Gothic. Out of the *fabliaux* and the *chansons* and Froissart he devised scenes and incidents which for the reader are like narrow windows opening into a charmed world. Alone among his books it has the true and undying magic. Sometimes, as in "The Blue Closet" and "The Wind" and "Two Red Roses across the Moon," the verse sways and sighs with ineffable longing; sometimes, as in "Sir Peter Harpdon's End," and the wonderful "Haystack in the Floods," there is a savage grimness and the ring of iron. There is no sentimentality, no vapours of the boudoir or the study. The whole spirit of the Middle Ages is there—its shuddering bravado, its angry credulity, its mysterious loneliness, and, like the voice of linnets in a wind, its adorable April songs. Morris seems to have attained in his early youth to his highest point in poetic form, as he did in prose, for no prose cadences of his later years are equal to those of his undergraduate story *The Hollow Land*.

The second class embraces *Jason* and *The Earthly Paradise*. Here the poet is not reconstructing the Middle Ages; he has, through some kink or fold of Time, become himself mediæval. These poems have all the mediæval languor and uniformity of pattern, nor do they always escape the mediæval prolixity. Gently, placidly, they unroll themselves at the speed of more leisured ages. One mediæval quality alone they lack, humour, for there is none of the Chaucerian jollity. "The mood," as Professor Elton has said, "is that of sad old men telling old stories to other sad old men." They are immensely long, as were the old romances; *The Earthly Paradise* is twice the length of *The Ring and the Book*. The language is a smooth-flowing crystal stream, there is no rhetoric, and in the rhythm, "too full for sound or foam," there is something curiously satisfying and restful. But while it never cloy, it may grow monotonous, for it has all the mediæval *ennui*. The manner is not suited equally well to all the tales, and "The Lovers of Gudrun" produces an effect different from the original in the *Laxdæla Saga*. The figures are scarcely human; they have not even the illusion of three dimensions which painting gives; they are flat, like the details in a tapestry. Morris has been called Homeric; but no wind from the outer world blows among the puppets of these poems, and we rarely have even the semblance of life. It is not Homer but Apollonius Rhodius—a decoration, not an epic.

Up to the early 'seventies Morris's inspiration in landscape had been the shallow green vales of the upper Thames, where the Windrush and the Evenlode wind among meadows like the brooks in an illuminated missal. But now he fell in love with a wilder land,

and his two visits to Iceland in 1871 and 1873, and his study of the Sagas (for which purpose he acquired the language) made him the interpreter of the great tragic poetry and the austere creed of the North. He was fascinated by the "old Norse nobility of soul," which could practise virtue for its own sake without hope of present or future reward, and which built up a cosmogony in which Good must be followed though Good is destined to fail. In his *Sigurd* he produced a poem which was his own version of this faith—its gallant fatalism, its sense of doom ever present, but the great heart defying it. It is his nearest approach to the epic mood. The languor and monotony of the Middle Ages are forgotten, there is a cold wind blowing from the snows, and the story moves with a fierce, ringing speed. With *Sigurd* he reached perfection in that simple diction which is fitted both for plain and splendid narrative, which can kindle at the high tragic moment and yet does not lose its aptness in homely scenes. The work must always remain a fine, a unique achievement, but there is something lacking, something which is present in the broken lays of the *Elder Edda*, and which we can only call magic. *Sigurd* impresses, but does not haunt the mind, as some of *The Defence of Guenevere* haunts it.

Morris can be represented not unfairly by selections. His work, except the earliest, is so much of a piece that its quality can be shown by extracts, and those who like the pattern can have recourse to the complete poems. He stands by himself in the history of literature, for he has little recognizable ancestry. Few things influenced him in English after Chaucer, though he found much that he liked; nor was he the product of the Greek and

Latin classics. One book, his first, profoundly affected his contemporaries, but for the rest he made a world of his own into which no successor has dared to stray. He is rarely quoted or quotable, for his unit was not the phrase or the line, but the picture ; but he has left us a gallery of rare and delectable pictures—a land East of the Sun and West of the Moon, in which we can rest as in a pleasaunce of Spenser's. He did more than any other man, too, to bring the tonic Northern philosophy within reach of his countrymen. Above all, he has dignified the craft of letters by a character perhaps the most generous, simple, manly, and dutiful since Sir Walter Scott.

JOHN BUCHAN.

The poetry of William Morris has been published by Longmans in eleven volumes, and the complete works in twenty-four volumes (1913-15). There is an admirable *Life* by J. W. Mackail (Longmans, 1899). For criticism, see especially Professor Elton's *A Survey of English Literature*, 1830-80," II. 31-54.

EARLY ROMANCES

SELECTIONS FROM WILLIAM MORRIS

THE DEFENCE OF GUENEVERE

BUT, knowing now that they would have her speak,
She threw her wet hair backward from her brow,
Her hand close to her mouth touching her cheek,

As though she had had there a shameful blow,
And feeling it shameful to feel ought but shame
All through her heart, yet felt her cheek burned so,

She must a little touch it ; like one lame
She walked away from Gauwaine, with her head
Still lifted up ; and on her cheek of flame

The tears dried quick ; she stopped at last and said :
“ O knights and lords, it seems but little skill
To talk of well-known things past now and dead.

“ God wot I ought to say, I have done ill,
And pray you all forgiveness heartily !
Because you must be right such great lords—still

“ Listen, suppose your time were come to die,
And you were quite alone and very weak ;
Yea, laid a dying while very mightily

" The wind was ruffling up the narrow streak
Of river through your broad lands running well :
Suppose a hush should come, then some one speak :

" ' One of these cloths is heaven, and one is hell,
Now choose one cloth for ever, which they be,
I will not tell you, you must somehow tell

" ' Of your own strength and mightiness ; here, see ! '
Yea, yea, my lord, and you to ope your eyes,
At foot of your familiar bed to see

" A great God's angel standing, with such dyes,
Not known on earth, on his great wings, and hands,
Held out two ways, light from the inner skies

" Showing him well, and making his commands
Seem to be God's commands, moreover, too,
Holding within his hands the cloths on wands ;

" And one of these strange choosing cloths was blue,
Wavy and long, and one cut short and red ;
No man could tell the better of the two.

" After a shivering half-hour you said,
' God help ! heaven's colour, the blue ; ' and he said,
' hell.'

Perhaps you then would roll upon your bed,

" And cry to all good men that loved you well,
' Ah Christ ! if only I had known, known, known ; '
Launcelot went away, then I could tell,

" Like wisest man how all things would be, moan,
And roll and hurt myself, and long to die,
And yet fear much to die for what was sown.

" Nevertheless you, O Sir Gauwaine, lie,
Whatever may have happened through these years,
God knows I speak truth, saying that you lie."

Her voice was low at first, being full of tears,
But as it cleared, it grew full loud and shrill,
Growing a windy shriek in all men's ears,

A ringing in their startled brains, until
She said that Gauwaine lied, then her voice sunk,
And her great eyes began again to fill,

Though still she stood right up, and never shrunk,
But spoke on bravely, glorious lady fair !
Whatever tears her full lips may have drunk,

She stood, and seemed to think, and wrung her hair,
Spoke out at last with no more trace of shame,
With passionate twisting of her body there :

" It chanced upon a day that Launcelot came
To dwell at Arthur's court : at Christmas-time
This happened ; when the heralds sung his name,

" ' Son of King Ban of Benwick,' seemed to chime
Along with all the bells that rang that day,
O'er the white roofs, with little change of rhyme.

" Christmas and whitened winter passed away,
And over me the April sunshine came,
Made very awful with black hail-clouds, yea

" And in the Summer I grew white with flame,
And bowed my head down—Autumn, and the sick
Sure knowledge things would never be the same,

" However often Spring might be most thick
Of blossoms and buds, smote on me, and I grew
Careless of most things, let the clock tick, tick,

" To my unhappy pulse, that beat right through
My eager body ; while I laughed out loud,
And let my lips curl up at false or true,

" Seemed cold and shallow without any cloud.
Behold my judges, then the cloths were brought :
While I was dizzied thus, old thoughts would crowd,

" Belonging to the time ere I was bought
By Arthur's great name and his little love,
Must I give up for ever then, I thought,

" That which I deemed would ever round me move
Glorifying all things ; for a little word,
Scarce ever meant at all, must I now prove

" Stone-cold for ever ? Pray you, does the Lord
Will that all folks should be quite happy and good ?
I love God now a little, if this cord

" Were broken, once for all what striving could
Make me love anything in earth or heaven.
So day by day it grew, as if one should

" Slip slowly down some path worn smooth and even,
Down to a cool sea on a summer day ;
Yet still in slipping was there some small leaven

" Of stretched hands catching small stones by the way,
Until one surely reached the sea at last,
And felt strange new joy as the worn head lay

" Back, with the hair like sea-weed ; yea all past
Sweat of the forehead, dryness of the lips,
Washed utterly out by the dear waves o'er cast

" In the lone sea, far off from any ships !
Do I not know now of a day in Spring ?
No minute of that wild day ever slips

" From out my memory ; I hear thrushes sing,
And wheresoever I may be, straightway
Thoughts of it all come up with most fresh sting ;

“ I was half mad with beauty on that day,
And went without my ladies all alone,
In a quiet garden walled round every way ;

“ I was right joyful of that wall of stone,
That shut the flowers and trees up with the sky,
And trebled all the beauty : to the bone,

“ Yea right through to my heart, grown very shy
With weary thoughts, it pierced, and made me glad ;
Exceedingly glad, and I knew verily,

“ A little thing just then had made me mad ;
I dared not think, as I was wont to do,
Sometimes, upon my beauty ; if I had

“ Held out my long hand up against the blue,
And, looking on the tenderly darkened fingers,
Thought that by rights one ought to see quite through,

“ There, see you, where the soft still light yet lingers,
Round by the edges ; what should I have done,
If this had joined with yellow spotted singers,

“ And startling green drawn upward by the sun ?
But shouting, loosed out, see now ! all my hair,
And trancedly stood watching the west wind run

“ With faintest half-heard breathing sound—why there
I lose my head e’en now in doing this ;
But shortly listen—In that garden fair

“ Came Launcelot walking ; this is true, the kiss
Wherewith we kissed in meeting that spring day,
I scarce dare talk of the remembered bliss,

“ When both our mouths went wandering in one way,
And aching sorely, met among the leaves ;
Our hands being left behind strained far away.

“ Never within a yard of my bright sleeves
Had Launcelot come before—and now, so nigh !
After that day why is it Guenevere grieves ?

“ Nevertheless you, O Sir Gauwaine, lie,
Whatever happened on through all those years,
God knows I speak truth, saying that you lie.

“ Being such a lady could I weep these tears
If this were true ? A great queen such as I
Having sinned this way, straight her conscience sears ;

“ And afterwards she liveth hatefully,
Slaying and poisoning, certes never weeps,—
Gauwaine be friends now, speak me lovingly.

“ Do I not see how God’s dear pity creeps
All through your frame, and trembles in your mouth ?
Remember in what grave your mother sleeps,

“ Buried in some place far down in the south,
Men are forgetting as I speak to you ;
By her head severed in that awful drouth

“ Of pity that drew Agravaine’s fell blow,
I pray your pity ! let me not scream out
For ever after, when the shrill winds blow

“ Through half your castle-locks ! let me not shout
For ever after in the winter night
When you ride out alone ! in battle-rout

“ Let not my rusting tears make your sword light !
Ah ! God of mercy how he turns away !
So, ever must I dress me to the fight,

“ So—let God’s justice work ! Gauwaine, I say,
See me hew down your proofs : yea all men know
Even as you said how Mellyagraunce one day,

" One bitter day in *la Fausse Garde*, for so
All good knights held it after, saw—
Yea, sirs, by cursed unknightly outrage ; though

" You, Gauwaine, held his word without a flaw,
This Mellyagraunce saw blood upon my bed—
Whose blood then pray you ? is there any law

" To make a queen say why some spots of red
Lie on her coverlet ? or will you say,
' Your hands are white, lady, as when you wed,

" ' Where did you bleed ? ' and must I stammer out—
' Nay,

I blush indeed, fair lord, only to rend
My sleeve up to my shoulder, where there lay

" ' A knife-point last night : ' so must I defend
The honour of the Lady Guenevere ?
Not so, fair lords, even if the world should end

" This very day, and you were judges here
Instead of God. Did you see Mellyagraunce
When Launcelot stood by him ? what white fear

" Curdled his blood, and how his teeth did dance,
His side sink in ? as my knight cried and said,
' Slayer of unarmed men, here is a chance !

" ' Setter of traps, I pray you guard your head,
By God I am so glad to fight with you,
Stripper of ladies, that my hand feels lead

" ' For driving weight ; hurrah now ! draw and do,
For all my wounds are moving in my breast,
And I am getting mad with waiting so.'

" He struck his hands together o'er the beast,
Who fell down flat, and grovelled at his feet,
And groaned at being slain so young—' at least.'

" My knight said, ' Rise you, sir, who are so fleet
At catching ladies, half-armed will I fight,
My left side all uncovered ! ' then I weet.

" Up sprang Sir Mellyagraunce with great delight
Upon his knave's face ; not until just then
Did I quite hate him, as I saw my knight

" Along the lists look to my stake and pen
With such a joyous smile, it made me sigh
From agony beneath my waist-chain, when

" The fight began, and to me they drew nigh :
Ever Sir Launcelot kept him on the right,
And traversed warily, and ever high

" And fast leapt caitiff's sword, until my knight
Sudden threw up his sword to his left hand,
Caught it, and swung it ; that was all the fight.

" Except a spout of blood on the hot land ;
For it was hottest summer ; and I know
I wondered how the fire, while I should stand,

" And burn, against the heat, would quiver so,
Yards above my head ; thus these matters went ;
Which things were only warnings of the woe

" That fell on me. Yet Mellyagraunce was shent,
For Mellyagraunce had fought against the Lord ;
Therefore, my lords, take heed lest you be blent

" With all this wickedness ; say no rash word
Against me, being so beautiful ; my eyes,
Wept all away to grey, may bring some sword

" To drown you in your blood ; see my breast rise,
Like waves of purple sea, as here I stand ;
And how my arms are moved in wonderful wise,

“ Yea also at my full heart's strong command,
See through my long throat how the words go up
In ripples to my mouth ; how in my hand

“ The shadow lies like wine within a cup
Of marvellously coloured gold ; yea now
This little wind is rising, look you up,

“ And wonder how the light is falling so
Within my moving tresses : will you dare,
When you have looked a little on my brow,

“ To say this thing is vile ? or will you care
For any plausible lies of cunning woof,
When you can see my face with no lie there

“ For ever ? am I not a gracious proof—
' But in your chamber Launcelot was found '—
Is there a good knight then would stand aloof,

“ When a queen says with gentle queenly sound :
' O true as steel come now and talk with me,
I love to see your step upon the ground

“ ‘ Unwavering, also well I love to see
That gracious smile light up your face, and hear
Your wonderful words, that all mean verily

“ ‘ The thing they seem to mean : good friend, so dear
To me in everything, come here to-night,
Or else the hours will pass most dull and drear ;

“ ‘ If you come not, I fear this time I might
Get thinking over much of times gone by,
When I was young, and green hope was in sight ;

“ ‘ For no man cares now to know why I sigh ;
And no man comes to sing me pleasant songs,
Nor any brings me the sweet flowers that lie

“ ‘ So thick in the gardens ; therefore one so longs
To see you, Launcelot ; that we may be
Like children once again, free from all wrongs

“ ‘ Just for one night.’ Did he not come to me ?
What thing could keep true Launcelot away
If I said ‘ come ’ ? there was one less than three

“ In my quiet room that night, and we were gay ;
Till sudden I rose up, weak, pale, and sick,
Because a bawling broke our dream up, yea

“ I looked at Launcelot’s face and could not speak,
For he looked helpless too, for a little while ;
Then I remember how I tried to shriek,

“ And could not, but fell down ; from tile to tile
The stones they threw up rattled o’er my head,
And made me dizzier ; till within a while

“ My maids were all about me, and my head
On Launcelot’s breast was being soothed away
From its white chattering, until Launcelot said—

“ By God ! I will not tell you more to-day,
Judge any way you will—what matters it ?
You know quite well the story of that fray,

“ How Launcelot stilled their bawling, the mad fit
That caught up Gauwaine—all, all, verily,
But just that which would save me ; these things flit.

“ Nevertheless you, O Sir Gauwaine, lie,
Whatever may have happened these long years,
God knows I speak truth, saying that you lie !

“ All I have said is truth, by Christ’s dear tears.”
She would not speak another word, but stood
Turned sideways ; listening, like a man who hears

His brother's trumpet sounding through the wood
Of his foes' lances. She leaned eagerly,
And gave a slight spring sometimes, as she could

At last hear something really ; joyfully
Her cheek grew crimson, as the headlong speed
Of the roan charger drew all men to see,
The knight who came was Launcelot at good need.

KING ARTHUR'S TOMB

Hot August noon—already on that day
Since sunrise through the Wiltshire downs, most sad
Of mouth and eye, he had gone leagues of way ;
Ay and by night, till whether good or bad

He was, he knew not, though he knew perchance
That he was Launcelot, the bravest knight
Of all who since the world was, have borne lance,
Or swung their swords in wrong cause or in right.

Nay, he knew nothing now, except that where
The Glastonbury gilded towers shine,
A lady dwelt, whose name was Guenevere ;
This he knew also ; that some fingers twine,

Not only in a man's hair, even his heart,
(Making him good or bad I mean,) but in his life,
Skies, earth, men's looks and deeds, all that has part,
Not being ourselves, in that half-sleep, half-strife,

(Strange sleep, strange strife,) that men call living ; so
Was Launcelot most glad when the moon rose,
Because it brought new memories of her—" Lo,
Between the trees a large moon, the wind lows

“ Not loud, but as a cow begins to low,
Wishing for strength to make the herdsman hear :
The ripe corn gathereth dew ; yea, long ago,
In the old garden life, my Guenevere

“ Loved to sit still among the flowers, till night
Had quite come on, hair loosened, for she said,
Smiling like heaven, that its fairness might
Draw up the wind sooner to cool her head.

“ Now while I ride how quick the moon gets small,
As it did then—I tell myself a tale
That will not last beyond the whitewashed wall,
Thoughts of some joust must help me through the vale,

“ Keep this till after—How Sir Gareth ran
A good course that day under my Queen’s eyes,
And how she swayed laughing at Dinadan—
No—back again, the other thoughts will rise,

“ And yet I think so fast ’twill end right soon—
Verily then I think, that Guenevere,
Made sad by dew and wind, and tree-barred moon,
Did love me more than ever, was more dear

“ To me than ever, she would let me lie
And kiss her feet, or, if I sat behind,
Would drop her hand and arm most tenderly,
And touch my mouth. And she would let me wind

“ Her hair around my neck, so that it fell
Upon my red robe, strange in the twilight
With many unnamed colours, till the bell
Of her mouth on my cheek sent a delight

“ Through all my ways of being ; like the stroke
Wherewith God threw all men upon the face

When he took Enoch, and when Enoch woke
With a changed body in the happy place.

“ Once, I remember, as I sat beside,
She turned a little, and laid back her head,
And slept upon my breast : I almost died
In those night-watches with my love and dread,

“ There lily-like she bowed her head and slept,
And I breathed low, and did not dare to move,
But sat and quivered inwardly, thoughts crept,
And frightened me with pulses of my Love.

“ The stars shone out above the doubtful green
Of her boddice, in the green sky overhead ;
Pale in the green sky were the stars I ween,
Because the moon shone like a star she shed

“ When she dwelt up in heaven a while ago,
And ruled all things but God : the night went on,
The wind grew cold, and the white moon grew low,
One hand had fallen down, and now lay on

“ My cold stiff palm ; there were no colours then
For near an hour, and I fell asleep
In spite of all my striving, even when
I held her whose name-letters make me leap.

“ I did not sleep long, feeling that in sleep
I did some loved one wrong, so that the sun
Had only just arisen from the deep
Still land of colours, when before me one

“ Stood whom I knew, but scarcely dared to touch,
She seemed to have changed so in the night ;
Moreover she held scarlet lilies, such
As Maiden Margaret bears upon the light

“ Of the great church walls, natheless did I walk
Through the fresh wet woods, and the wheat that
morn,
Touching her hair and hand and mouth, and talk
Of love we held, nigh hid among the corn.

“ Back to the palace, ere the sun grew high,
We went, and in a cool green room all day
I gazed upon the arras giddily,
Where the wind set the silken kings a-sway.

“ I could not hold her hand, or see her face ;
For which may God forgive me ! but I think,
Howsoever, that she was not in that place.”
These memories Launcelot was quick to drink ;

And when these fell, some paces past the wall,
There rose yet others, but they wearied more,
And tasted not so sweet ; they did not fall
So soon, but vaguely wrenched his strained heart sore

In shadowy slipping from his grasp ; these gone,
A longing followed ; if he might but touch
That Guenevere at once ! Still night, the lone
Grey horse's head before him vexed him much,

In steady nodding over the grey road—
Still night, and night, and night, and emptied heart
Of any stories ; what a dismal load
Time grew at last, yea, when the night did part,

And let the sun flame over all, still there
The horse's grey ears turned this way and that,
And still he watched them twitching in the glare
Of the morning sun, behind them still he sat,

Quite wearied out with all the wretched night,
Until about the dustiest of the day,

On the last down's brow he drew his rein in sight
Of the Glastonbury roofs that choke the way.

And he was now quite giddy as before,
When she slept by him, tired out and her hair
Was mingled with the rushes on the floor,
And he, being tired too, was scarce aware

Of her presence ; yet as he sat and gazed,
A shiver ran throughout him, and his breath
Came slower, he seemed suddenly amazed,
As though he had not heard of Arthur's death.

This for a moment only, presently
He rode on giddy still, until he reached
A place of apple-trees, by the thorn-tree
Wherefrom St. Joseph in the days past preached.

Dazed there he laid his head upon a tomb,
Not knowing it was Arthur's, at which sight
One of her maidens told her, " he is come,"
And she went forth to meet him ; yet a blight

Had settled on her, all her robes were black,
With a long white veil only ; she went slow,
As one walks to be slain, her eyes did lack
Half her old glory, yea, alas ! the glow

Had left her face and hands ; this was because
As she lay last night on her purple bed,
Wishing for morning, grudging every pause
Of the palace clocks, until that Launcelot's head

Should lie on her breast, with all her golden hair
Each side—when suddenly the thing grew drear,
In morning twilight, when the grey downs bare
Grew into lumps of sin to Guenevere.

At first she said no word, but lay quite still,
Only her mouth was open, and her eyes
Gazed wretchedly about from hill to hill ;
As though she asked, not with so much surprise

As tired disgust, what made them stand up there
So cold and grey. After, a spasm took
Her face, and all her frame, she caught her hair,
All her hair, in both hands, terribly she shook,

And rose till she was sitting in the bed,
Set her teeth hard, and shut her eyes and seemed
As though she would have torn it from her head,
Natheless she dropped it, lay down, as she deemed

It mattered not whatever she might do—
O Lord Christ ! pity on her ghastly face !
Those dismal hours while the cloudless blue
Drew the sun higher—He did give her grace ;

Because at last she rose up from her bed,
And put her raiment on, and knelt before
The blessed rood, and with her dry lips said,
Muttering the words against the marble floor :

“ Unless you pardon, what shall I do, Lord,
But go to hell ? and there see day by day
Foul deed on deed, hear foulest word on word,
For ever and ever, such as on the way

“ To Camelot I heard once from a churl,
That curled me up upon my jennet's neck
With bitter shame ; how then, Lord, should I curl
For ages and for ages ? dost thou reckon

“ That I am beautiful, Lord, even as you
And your dear Mother ? why did I forget

You were so beautiful, and good, and true,
That you loved me so, Guenevere ? O yet

" If even I go hell, I cannot choose
But love you, Christ, yea, though I cannot keep
From loving Launcelot ; O Christ ! must I lose
My own heart's love ? see, though I cannot weep,

" Yet am I very sorry for my sin ;
Moreover, Christ, I cannot bear that hell,
I am most fain to love you, and to win
A place in heaven some time—I cannot tell—

" Speak to me, Christ ! I kiss, kiss, kiss your feet ;
Ah ! now I weep !"—The maid said, " By the tomb
He waiteth for you, lady," coming fleet,
Not knowing what woe filled up all the room.

So Guenevere rose and went to meet him there,
He did not hear her coming, as he lay
On Arthur's head, till some of her long hair
Brushed on the new-cut stone—" Well done ! to pray

" For Arthur, my dear lord, the greatest king
That ever lived." " Guenevere ! Guenevere !
Do you not know me, are you gone mad ? fling
Your arms and hair about me, lest I fear

" You are not Guenevere, but some other thing."
" Pray you forgive me, fair lord Launcelot !
I am not mad, but I am sick ; they cling,
God's curses, unto such as I am ; not

" Ever again shall we twine arms and lips."
" Yea, she is mad : thy heavy law, O Lord,
Is very tight about her now, and grips
Her poor heart, so that no right word

" Can reach her mouth ; so, Lord, forgive her now,
That she not knowing what she does, being mad,
Kills me in this way—Guenevere, bend low
And kiss me once ! for God's love kiss me ! sad

" Though your face is, you look much kinder now ;
Yea once, once for the last time kiss me, lest I die."
" Christ ! my hot lips are very near his brow,
Help me to save his soul !—Yea, verily,

" Across my husband's head, fair Launcelot !
Fair serpent marked with V upon the head !
This thing we did while yet he was alive,
Why not, O twisting knight, now he is dead ?

" Yea, shake ! shake now and shiver ! if you can
Remember anything for agony,
Pray you remember how when the wind ran
One cool spring evening through fair aspen-tree,

" And elm and oak about the palace there,
The king came back from battle, and I stood
To meet him, with my ladies, on the stair,
My face made beautiful with my young blood."

" Will she lie now, Lord God ? " " Remember too,
Wrung heart, how first before the knights there came
A royal bier, hung round with green and blue,
About it shone great tapers with sick flame.

" And thereupon Lucius, the Emperor,
Lay royal-robed, but stone-cold now and dead,
Not able to hold sword or sceptre more,
But not quite grim ; because his cloven head

" Bore no marks now of Launcelot's bitter sword,
Being by embalmers deftly soldered up ;

So still it seemed the face of a great lord,
Being mended as a craftsman mends a cup.

“ Also the heralds sung rejoicingly
To their long trumpets ; ‘ Fallen under shield,
Here lieth Lucius, King of Italy,
Slain by Lord Launcelot in open field.’

“ Thereat the people shouted ‘ Launcelot ! ’
And through the spears I saw you drawing nigh,
You and Lord Arthur—nay, I saw you not,
But rather Arthur, God would not let die,

“ I hoped, these many years, he should grow great,
And in his great arms still encircle me,
Kissing my face, half blinded with the heat
Of king’s love for the queen I used to be.

“ Launcelot, Launcelot, why did he take your hand,
When he had kissed me in his kingly way ?
Saying, ‘ This is the knight whom all the land
Calls Arthur’s banner, sword, and shield to-day ;

“ ‘ Cherish him, love.’ Why did your long lips cleave
In such strange way unto my fingers then ?
So eagerly glad to kiss, so loath to leave
When you rose up ? Why among helmed men

“ Could I always tell you by your long strong arms,
And sway like an angel’s in your saddle there ?
Why sickened I so often with alarms
Over the tilt-yard ? Why were you more fair

“ Than aspens in the autumn at their best ?
Why did you fill all lands with your great fame,
So that Breuse even, as he rode, feared lest
At turning of the way your shield should flame ?

" Was it nought then, my agony and strife ?
When as day passed by day, year after year,
I found I could not live a righteous life ?
Didst ever think that queens held their truth dear ?

" O, but your lips say, ' Yea, but she was cold
Sometimes, always uncertain as the spring ;
When I was sad she would be over-bold,
Longing for kisses ; ' when war-bells did ring,

" The back-tolled bells of noisy Camelot."—
" Now, Lord God, listen ! listen, Guenevere,
Though I am weak just now, I think there's not
A man who dares to say, ' You hated her,

" ' And left her moaning while you fought your fill
In the daisied meadows ; ' lo you her thin hand,
That on the carven stone can not keep still,
Because she loves me against God's command,

" Has often been quite wet with tear on tear,
Tears Launcelot keeps somewhere, surely not
In his own heart, perhaps in Heaven, where
He will not be these ages."—" Launcelot !

" Loud lips, wrung heart ! I say, when the bells rang,
The noisy back-tolled bells of Camelot,
There were two spots on earth, the thrushes sang
In the lonely gardens where my love was not,

" Where I was almost weeping ; I dared not
Weep quite in those days, lest one maid should say,
In tittering whispers : ' Where is Launcelot
To wipe with some kerchief those tears away ? ' "

" Another answer sharply with brows knit,
And warning hand up, scarcely lower though,

' You speak too loud, see you, she heareth it,
This tigress fair has claws, as I well know,

" ' As Launcelot knows too, the poor knight ! well-a-day !
Why met he not with Iseult from the West,
Or, better still, Iseult of Brittany,
Perchance indeed quite ladyless were best.'

" Alas, my maids, you loved not overmuch
Queen Guenevere, uncertain as sunshine
In March ; forgive me ! for my sin being such,
About my whole life, all my deeds did twine,

" Made me quite wicked ; as I found out then,
I think ; in the lonely palace, where each morn
We went, my maids and I, to say prayers when
They sang mass in the chapel on the lawn.

" And every morn I scarce could pray at all,
For Launcelot's red-golden hair would play,
Instead of sunlight, on the painted wall,
Mingled with dreams of what the priest did say ;

" Grim curses out of Peter and of Paul ;
Judging of strange sins in Leviticus ;
Another sort of writing on the wall,
Scored deep across the painted heads of us.

" Christ sitting with the woman at the well,
And Mary Magdalen repenting there,
Her dimmed eyes scorched and red at sight of hell
So hardly 'scaped, no gold light on her hair.

" And if the priest said anything that seemed
To touch upon the sin they said we did,—
(This in their teeth) they looked as if they deemed
That I was spying what thoughts might be hid

“ Under green-covered bosoms, heaving quick
Beneath quick thoughts ; while they grew red with
shame,
And gazed down at their feet—while I felt sick,
And almost shrieked if one should call my name.

“ The thrushes sang in the lone garden there—
But where you were the birds were scared I trow—
Clanging of arms about pavilions fair,
Mixed with the knight's laughs ; there, as I well know,

“ Rode Launcelot, the king of all the band,
And scowling Gauwaine, like the night in day,
And handsome Gareth, with his great white hand
Curled round the helm-crest, ere he joined the fray ;

“ And merry Dinadan with sharp dark face,
All true knights loved to see ; and in the fight
Great Tristram, and though helmed you could trace
In all his bearing the frank noble knight ;

“ And by him Palomydes, helmet off,
He fought, his face brushed by his hair,
Red heavy swinging hair ; he feared a scoff
So overmuch, though what true knight would dare

“ To mock that face, fretted with useless care,
And bitter useless striving after love ?
O Palomydes, with much honour bear
Beast Glatysaunt upon your shield, above

“ Your helm that hides the swinging of your hair,
And think of Iseult, as your sword drives through
Much mail and plate—O God, let me be there
A little time, as I was long ago !

“ Because stout Gareth lets his spear fall low,
Gauwaine, and Launcelot, and Dinadan

Are helmed and waiting ; let the trumpets go !
Bend over, ladies, to see all you can !

“ Clench teeth, dames, yea, clasp hands, for Gareth's
spear
Throws Kay from out his saddle, like a stone
From a castle-window when the foe draws near—
' Iseult ! '—Sir Dinadan rolleth overthrown.

“ ' Iseult ! '—again—the pieces of each spear
Fly fathoms up, and both the great steeds reel ;
' Tristram for Iseult ! ' ' Iseult ! ' and ' Guenevere,'
The ladies' names bite verily like steel.

“ They bite—bite me, Lord God—I shall go mad,
Or else die kissing him, he is so pale,
He thinks me mad already, O bad ! bad !
Let me lie down a little while and wail.”

“ No longer so, rise up, I pray you, love,
And slay me really, then we shall be healed,
Perchance, in the aftertime by God above.”
“ Banner of Arthur—with black-bended shield

“ Sinister-wise across the fair gold ground !
Here let me tell you what a knight you are,
O sword and shield of Arthur ! you are found
A crooked sword, I think, that leaves a scar

“ On the bearer's arm, so be he thinks it straight,
Twisted Malay's crease beautiful blue-grey,
Poisoned with sweet fruit ; as he found too late,
My husband Arthur, on some bitter day !

“ O sickle cutting hemlock the day long !
That the husbandman across his shoulder hangs,
And, going homeward about evensong,
Dies the next morning, struck through by the fangs !

"Banner, and sword, and shield, you dare not pray
to die,

Lest you meet Arthur in the other world,
And, knowing who you are, he pass you by,
Taking short turns that he may watch you curled

"Body and face and limbs in agony,

Lest he weep presently and go away,
Saying, 'I loved him once,' with a sad sigh—

Now I have slain him, Lord, let me go too, I pray.

[LAUNCELOT *falls*.

"Alas, alas! I know not what to do,

If I run fast it is perchance that I
May fall and stun myself, much better so,
Never, never again! not even when I die."

LAUNCELOT, *on awaking*

"I stretched my hands towards her and fell down,

How long I lay in swoon I cannot tell:
My head and hands were bleeding from the stone,
When I rose up, also I heard a bell."

SIR GALAHAD, A CHRISTMAS MYSTERY

It is the longest night in all the year,

Near on the day when the Lord Christ was born;
Six hours ago I came and sat down here,
And pondered sadly, wearied and forlorn.

The winter wind that passed the chapel-door,

Sang out a moody tune, that went right well
With mine own thoughts: I looked down on the floor,
Between my feet, until I heard a bell

Sound a long way off through the forest deep,
And toll on steadily ; a drowsiness
Came on me, so that I fell half asleep,
As I sat there not moving : less and less

I saw the melted snow that hung in beads
Upon my steel-shoes ; less and less I saw
Between the tiles the bunches of small weeds :
Heartless and stupid, with no touch of awe

Upon me, half-shut eyes upon the ground,
I thought ; O ! Galahad, the days go by,
Stop and cast up now that which you have found,
So sorely you have wrought and painfully.

Night after night your horse treads down alone
The sere damp fern, night after night you sit
Holding the bridle like a man of stone,
Dismal, unfriended, what thing comes of it.

And what if Palomydes also ride,
And over many a mountain and bare heath
Follow the questing beast with none beside ?
Is he not able still to hold his breath

With thoughts of Iseult ? doth he not grow pale
With weary striving, to seem best of all
To her, " as she is best," he saith ? to fail
Is nothing to him, he can never fall.

For unto such a man love-sorrow is
So dear a thing unto his constant heart,
That even if he never win one kiss,
Or touch from Iseult, it will never part.

And he will never know her to be worse
Than in his happiest dreams he thinks she is :

Good knight, and faithful, you have 'scaped the curse
In wonderful-wise ; you have great store of bliss.

Yea, what if Father Launcelot ride out,
Can he not think of Guenevere's arms, round,
Warm and lithe, about his neck, and shout
Till all the place grows joyful with the sound ?

And when he lists can often see her face,
And think, " Next month I kiss you, or next week,
And still you think of me : " therefore the place
Grows very pleasant, whatsoever he seek.

But me, who ride alone, some carle shall find
Dead in my arms in the half-melted snow,
When all unkindly with the shifting wind,
The thaw comes on at Candlemas : I know

Indeed that they will say : " This Galahad
If he had lived had been a right good knight ;
Ah ! poor chaste body ! " but they will be glad,
Not most alone, but all, when in their sight

That very evening in their scarlet sleeves
The gay-dressed minstrels sing ; no maid will talk
Of sitting on my tomb, until the leaves,
Grown big upon the bushes of the walk,

East of the Palace-pleasaunce, make it hard
To see the minster therefrom : well-a-day !
Before the trees by autumn were well bared,
I saw a damozel with gentle play,

Within that very walk say last farewell
To her dear knight, just riding out to find
(Why should I choke to say it ?) the Sangreal,
And their last kisses sunk into my mind,

Yea, for she stood leaned forward on his breast,
Rather, scarce stood ; the back of one dear hand,
That it might well be kissed, she held and pressed
Against his lips ; long time they stood there, fanned

By gentle gusts of quiet frosty wind,
Till Mador de la porte a-going by,
And my own horsehoofs roused them ; they untwined,
And parted like a dream. In this way I,

With sleepy face bent to the chapel floor,
Kept musing half asleep, till suddenly
A sharp bell rang from close beside the door,
And I leapt up when something passed me by,

Shrill ringing going with it, still half blind
I staggered after, a great sense of awe
At every step kept gathering on my mind,
Thereat I have no marvel, for I saw

One sitting on the altar as a throne,
Whose face no man could say he did not know,
And though the bell still rang, he sat alone,
With raiment half blood-red, half white as snow.

Right so I fell upon the floor and knelt,
Not as one kneels in church when mass is said,
But in a heap, quite nerveless, for I felt
The first time what a thing was perfect dread.

But mightily the gentle voice came down :
“ Rise up, and look and listen, Galahad,
Good knight of God, for you will see no frown
Upon my face ; I come to make you glad.

“ For that you say that you are all alone,
I will be with you always, and fear not

You are uncared for, though no maiden moan
Above your empty tomb ; for Launcelot,

“ He in good time shall be my servant too,
Meantime, take note whose sword first made him
knight,
And who has loved him alway, yea, and who
Still trusts him alway, though in all men's sight,

“ He is just what you know, O Galahad,
This love is happy even as you say,
But would you for a little time be glad,
To make ME sorry long day after day ?

“ Her warm arms round his neck half throttle Me,
The hot love-tears burn deep like spots of lead,
Yea, and the years pass quick : right dismally
Will Launcelot at one time hang his head ;

“ Yea, old and shrivelled he shall win my love.
Poor Palomydes fretting out his soul !
Not always is he able, son, to move
His love, and do it honour : needs must roll

“ The proudest destrier sometimes in the dust,
And then 'tis weary work ; he strives beside
Seem better than he is, so that his trust
Is always on what chances may betide ;

“ And so he wears away, my servant, too,
When all these things are gone, and wretchedly
He sits and longs to moan for Iseult, who
Is no care now to Palomydes : see,

“ O good son Galahad, upon this day,
Now even, all these things are on your side,
But these you fight not for ; look up, I say,
And see how I can love you, for no pride

" Closes your eyes, no vain lust keeps them down.
See now you have ME always ; following
That holy vision, Galahad, go on.
Until at last you come to Me to sing

" In Heaven always, and to walk around
The garden where I am : " he ceased, my face
And wretched body fell upon the ground ;
And when I looked again, the holy place

Was empty ; but right so the bell again
Came to the chapel-door, there entered
Two angels first, in white, without a stain,
And scarlet wings, then, after them a bed,

Four ladies bore, and set it down beneath
The very altar-step, and while for fear
I scarcely dared to move or draw my breath,
Those holy ladies gently came a-near,

And quite unarmed me, saying : " Galahad,
Rest here awhile and sleep, and take no thought
Of any other thing than being glad ;
Hither the Sangreal will be shortly brought,

" Yet must you sleep the while it stayeth here."
Right so they went away, and I, being weary,
Slept long and dreamed of Heaven : the bell comes near,
I doubt it grows to morning. Miserere !

*Enter two Angels in white, with scarlet wings ; also Four
Ladies in gowns of red and green ; also an Angel,
bearing in his hands a surcoat of white, with a red
cross.*

AN ANGEL

O servant of the high God, Galahad !
Rise and be armed, the Sangreal is gone forth

32 *Selections from William Morris*
Through the great forest, and you must be had
Unto the sea that lieth on the north :

There shall you find the wondrous ship wherein
The spindles of King Solomon are laid,
And the sword that no man draweth without sin,
But if he be most pure : and there is stayed

Hard by, Sir Launcelot, whom you will meet
In some short space upon that ship : first, though,
Will come here presently that lady sweet,
Sister of Percival, whom you well know,

And with her Bors and Percival : stand now,
These ladies will to arm you.

FIRST LADY, *putting on the hauberke.*

Galahad,
That I may stand so close beneath your brow,
I, Margaret of Antioch, am glad.

SECOND LADY, *girding him with the sword.*

That I may stand and touch you with my hand,
O Galahad, I, Cecily, am glad.

THIRD LADY, *buckling on the spurs.*

That I may kneel while up above you stand,
And gaze at me, O holy Galahad,
I, Lucy, am most glad.

FOURTH LADY, *putting on the basnet.*

O gentle knight,
That you bow down to us in reverence,
We are most glad, I, Katherine, with delight
Must needs fall trembling.

ANGEL, *putting on the crossed surcoat.*

Galahad, we go hence,
For here, amid the straying of the snow,
Come Percival's sister, Bors, and Percival.
[*The Four Ladies carry out the bed,*
and all go but Galahad.

GALAHAD

How still and quiet everything seems now :
They come, too, for I hear the horsehoofs fall.

Enter Sir Bors, Sir Percival, and his Sister

Fair friends and gentle lady, God you save !
A many marvels have been here to-night ;
Tell me what news of Launcelot you have,
And has God's body ever been in sight.

SIR BORS

Why, as for seeing that same holy thing,
As we were riding slowly side by side,
An hour ago, we heard a sweet voice sing,
And through the bare twigs saw a great light glide,

With many-coloured raiment, but far off,
And so passed quickly—from the court nought good ;
Poor merry Dinadan, that with jape and scoff
Kept us all merry, in a little wood

Was found all hacked and dead : Sir Lionel
And Gauwaine have come back from the great quest,
Just merely shamed ; and Lauvaine, who loved well
Your father Launcelot, at the king's behest

Went out to seek him, but was almost slain,
Perhaps is dead now ; everywhere
The knights come foiled from the great quest, in vain :
In vain they struggle for the vision fair.

SIR PETER HARPDON'S END

In an English Castle in Poitou

Sir Peter Harpdon, *a Gascon knight in the English service,*
and John Curzon, *his lieutenant*

JOHN CURZON

OF those three prisoners, that before you came
We took down at 'St. John's hard by the mill,
Two are good masons ; we have tools enough,
And you have skill to set them working.

SIR PETER

So—

What are their names ?

JOHN CURZON.

Why, Jacques Aquadent,
And Peter Plombiere, but—

SIR PETER

What coloured hair
Has Peter now ? has Jacques got bow legs ?

JOHN CURZON

Why, sir, you jest—what matters Jacques' hair,
Or Peter's legs to us ?

SIR PETER

O ! John, John, John !
Throw all your mason's tools down the deep well,
Hang Peter up and Jacques ; they're no good,
We shall not build, man.

JOHN CURZON (*going*)

Shall I call the guard
To hang them, sir ? and yet, sir, for the tools,
We'd better keep them still ; sir, fare you well.
[*Muttering as he goes.*
What have I done that he should jape at me ?
And why not build ? the walls are weak enough,
And we've two masons and a heap of tools.
[*Goes, still muttering.*

SIR PETER

To think a man should have a lump like that
For his lieutenant ! I must call him back,
Or else, as surely as St. George is dead,
He'll hang our friends the masons—here, John ! John !

JOHN CURZON

At your good service, sir.

SIR PETER

Come now, and talk
This weighty matter out ; there—we've no stone
To mend our walls with,—neither brick nor stone.

JOHN CURZON

There is a quarry, sir, some ten miles off.

SIR PETER

We are not strong enough to send ten men
Ten miles to fetch us stone enough to build,
In three hours' time they would be taken or slain,
The cursed Frenchmen ride abroad so thick.

JOHN CURZON

But we can send some villaynes to get stone.

SIR PETER

Alas ! John, that we cannot bring them back,
They would go off to Clisson or Sanxere,
And tell them we were weak in walls and men,
Then down go we ; for, look you, times are changed,
And now no longer does the country shake
At sound of English names ; our captains fade
From off our muster-rolls. At Lusac bridge
I dare say you may even yet see the hole
That Chandos beat in dying ; far in Spain
Pembroke is prisoner ; Phelton prisoner here ;
Manny lies buried in the Charterhouse ;
Oliver Clisson turned these years ago ;
The Captal died in prison ; and, over all,
Edward the prince lies underneath the ground,
Edward the king is dead, at Westminster
The carvers smooth the curls of his long beard.
Everything goes to rack—eh ! and we too.
Now, Curzon, listen ; if they come, these French,
Whom have I got to lean on here, but you ?
A man can die but once, will you die then,
Your brave sword in your hand, thoughts in your heart
Of all the deeds we have done here in France—
And yet may do ? So God will have your soul,
Whoever has your body.

JOHN CURZON

Why, sir, I

Will fight till the last moment, until then
Will do whate'er you tell me. Now I see
We must e'en leave the walls ; well, well, perhaps
They're stronger than I think for ; pity, though !
For some few tons of stone, if Guesclin comes.

SIR PETER

Farewell, John, pray you watch the Gascons well,
I doubt them.

JOHN CURZON

Truly, sir, I will watch well.

[Goes.]

SIR PETER

Farewell, good lump ! and yet, when all is said,
'Tis a good lump. Why then, if Guesclin comes ;
Some dozen stones from his petrariae,
And, under shelter of his crossbows, just
An hour's steady work with pickaxes,
Then a great noise—some dozen swords and glaives
A-playing on my basnet all at once,
And little more cross purposes on earth
For me.

Now this is hard : a month ago,
And a few minutes' talk had set things right
'Twixt me and Alice ;—if she had a doubt,
As (may Heaven bless her !) I scarce think she had,
'Twas but their hammer, hammer in her ears,
Of " how Sir Peter failed at Lusac bridge : "
And " how he was grown moody of late days ; "
And " how Sir Lambert " (think now !) " his dear friend,
His sweet, dear cousin, could not but confess
That Peter's talk tended towards the French,
Which he " (for instance Lambert) " was glad of,
Being " (Lambert, you see) " on the French side."

Well,

If I could but have seen her on that day,
Then, when they sent me off !

I like to think,
Although it hurts me, makes my head twist, what,
If I had seen her, what I should have said,
What she, my darling, would have said and done.
As thus perchance—

To find her sitting there,
In the window-seat, not looking well at all,
Crying perhaps, and I say quietly ;
" Alice ! " she looks up, chokes a sob, looks grave,

Changes from pale to red, but, ere she speaks,
 Straightway I kneel down there on both my knees
 And say : " O lady, have I sinned, your knight ?
 That still you ever let me walk alone
 In the rose garden, that you sing no songs
 When I am by, that ever in the dance
 You quietly walk away when I come near ?
 Now that I have you, will you go, think you ? "

Ere she could answer I would speak again,
 Still kneeling there.

" What ! they have frightened you,
 By hanging burs, and clumsily carven puppets,
 Round my good name ; but afterwards, my love,
 I will say what this means ; this moment, see !
 Do I kneel here, and can you doubt me ? Yea,"
 (For she would put her hands upon my face,)
 " Yea, that is best, yea feel, love, am I changed ? "
 And she would say : " Good knight, come, kiss my lips ! "
 And afterwards as I sat there would say :

" Please a poor silly girl by telling me
 What all those things they talk of really were,
 For it is true you did not help Chandos,
 And true, poor love ! you could not come to me
 When I was in such peril."

I should say :

" I am like Balen, all things turn to blame—
 I did not come to you ? At Bergerath
 The constable had held us close shut up,
 If from the barriers I had made three steps,
 I should have been but slain ; at Lusac, too,
 We struggled in a marish half the day,
 And came too late at last : you know, my love,
 How heavy men and horses are all armed.
 All that Sir Lambert said was pure, unmixed,
 Quite groundless lies ; as you can think, sweet love."

She, holding tight my hand as we sat there,
Started a little at Sir Lambert's name,
But otherwise she listened scarce at all
To what I said. Then with moist, weeping eyes,
And quivering lips, that scarcely let her speak,
She said, "I love you."

Other words were few,
The remnant of that hour ; her hand smoothed down
My foolish head ; she kissed me all about
My face, and through the tangles of my beard
Her little fingers crept.

O ! God, my Alice,
Not this good way : my lord but sent and said
That Lambert's sayings were taken at their worth,
Therefore that day I was to start, and keep
This hold against the French ; and I am here,—

[Looks out of the window.]

A sprawling lonely gard with rotten walls,
And no one to bring aid if Guesclin comes,
Or any other.

There's a pennon now !

At last.

But not the constable's, whose arms,
I wonder, does it bear ? Three golden rings
On a red ground ; my cousin's by the rood !
Well, I should like to kill him, certainly,
But to be killed by him—

[A trumpet sounds.]

That's for a herald ;

I doubt this does not mean assaulting yet.

Enter JOHN CURZON

What says the herald of our cousin, sir ?

JOHN CURZON

So please you, sir, concerning your estate,
He has good will to talk with you.

SIR PETER

Outside,
I'll talk with him, close by the gate St. Ives.
Is he unarmed ?

JOHN CURZON

Yea, sir, in a long gown.

SIR PETER

Then bid them bring me hither my furred gown
With the long sleeves, and under it I'll wear,
By Lambert's leave, a secret coat of mail ;
And will you lend me, John, your little axe ?
I mean the one with Paul wrought on the blade ?
And I will carry it inside my sleeve,
Good to be ready always—you, John, go
And bid them set up many suits of arms,
Bows, archgays, lances, in the base-court, and
Yourself, from the south postern setting out,
With twenty men, be ready to break through
Their unguarded rear when I cry out " St. George ! "

JOHN CURZON

How, sir ! will you attack him unawares.
And slay him unarmed ?

SIR PETER

Trust me, John, I know
The reason why he comes here with sleeved gown,
Fit to hide axes up. So, let us go. *[They go.]*

*Outside the castle by the great gate ; Sir Lambert and
Sir Peter seated ; guards attending each, the rest of
Sir Lambert's men drawn up about a furlong off.*

SIR PETER

And if I choose to take the losing side
Still, does it hurt you ?

SIR LAMBERT

O ! no hurt to me ;
 I see you sneering, " Why take trouble then,
 Seeing you love me not ? " look you, our house
 (Which, taken altogether, I love much)
 Had better be upon the right side now,
 If, once for all, it wishes to bear rule
 As such a house should : cousin, you're too wise
 To feed your hope up fat, that this fair France
 Will ever draw two ways again ; this side
 The French, wrong-headed, all a-jar
 With envious longings ; and the other side
 The ordered English, orderly led on
 By those two Edwards through all wrong and right,
 And muddling right and wrong to a thick broth
 With that long stick, their strength. This is all
 changed,
 The true French win, on either side you have
 Cool-headed men, good at a tilting match,
 And good at setting battles in array,
 And good at squeezing taxes at due time ;
 Therefore by nature we French being here
 Upon our own big land— [Sir Peter *laughs aloud*
 Well, Peter ! well !
 What makes you laugh ?

SIR PETER

Hearing you sweat to prove
 All this I know so well ; but you have read
 The siege of Troy ?

SIR LAMBERT

O ! yea, I know it well.

SIR PETER

There ! they were wrong, as wrong as men could be ;

For, as I think, they found it such delight
 To see fair Helen going through their town :
 Yea, any little common thing she did
 (As stooping to pick a flower) seemed so strange,
 So new in its great beauty, that they said ;
 " Here we will keep her living in this town,
 Till all burns up together." And so, fought,
 In a mad whirl of knowing they were wrong ;
 Yea, they fought well, and ever, like a man
 That hangs legs off the ground by both his hands,
 Over some great height, did they struggle sore,
 Quite sure to slip at last ; wherefore, take note
 How almost all men, reading that sad siege,
 Hold for the Trojans ; as I did at least,
 Thought Hector the best knight a long way :

Now

Why should I not do this thing that I think,
 For even when I come to count the gains,
 I have them my side : men will talk, you know,
 (We talk of Hector, dead so long ago,)
 When I am dead, of how this Peter clung
 To what he thought the right ; of how he died,
 Perchance, at last, doing some desperate deed
 Few men would care do now, and this is gain
 To me, as ease and money is to you,
 Moreover, too, I like the straining game
 Of striving well to hold up things that fall ;
 So one becomes great ; see you ! in good times
 All men live well together, and you, too,
 Live dull and happy—happy ? not so quick,
 Suppose sharp thoughts begin to burn you up.
 Why then, but just to fight as I do now,
 A halter round my neck, would be great bliss.
 O ! I am well off.

[*Aside.*

 Talk, and talk, and talk,
 I know this man has come to murder me,
 And yet I talk still.

SIR LAMBERT

If your side were right,
You might be, though you lost ; but if I said,
" You are a traitor, being, as you are,
Born Frenchman." What are Edwards unto you,
Or Richards ?

SIR PETER

Nay, hold there, my Lambert, hold !
For fear your zeal should bring you to some harm,
Don't call me traitor.

SIR LAMBERT

Furthermore, my knight,
Men call you slippery on your losing side,
When at Bordeaux I was ambassador,
I heard them say so, and could scarce say " Nay."
[*He takes hold of something in his
sleeve, and rises.*]

SIR PETER (*rising*)

They lied—and you lie, not for the first time.
What have you got there, fumbling up your sleeve,
A stolen purse ?

SIR LAMBERT

Nay, liar in your teeth !
Dead liar too ; St. Dennis and St. Lambert !
[*Strikes at Sir Peter with a dagger.*]

SIR PETER (*striking him flatlings with his axe*)

How thief ! thief ! thief ! so there, fair thief, so there,
St. George Guienne ! glaives for the castellan !
You French, you are but dead, unless you lay
Your spears upon the earth. St. George Guienne !

Well done, John Curzon, how he has them now.

In the Castle

JOHN CURZON

What shall we do with all these prisoners, sir ?

SIR PETER

Why put them all to ransom, those that can
Pay anything, but not too light though, John,
Seeing we have them on the hip : for those
That have no money, that being certified,
Why turn them out of doors before they spy ;
But bring Sir Lambert guarded unto me.

JOHN CURZON

I will, fair sir.

[He goes.]

SIR PETER

I do not wish to kill him,
Although I think I ought ; he shall go marked,
By all the saints, though !

Enter Lambert (guarded)

Now, Sir Lambert, now !

What sort of death do you expect to get,
Being taken this way ?

SIR LAMBERT

Cousin ! cousin ! think !

I am your own blood ; may God pardon me !
I am not fit to die ; if you knew all,
All I have done since I was young and good,
O ! you would give me yet another chance,
As God would, that I might wash all clear out,
By serving you and Him. Let me go now !
And I will pay you down more golden crowns
Of ransom than the king would !

SIR PETER

Well, stand back,
And do not touch me ! No, you shall not die,
Nor yet pay ransom. You, John Curzon, cause
Some carpenters to build a scaffold, high,
Outside the gate ; when it is built, sound out
To all good folks, " Come, see a traitor punished ! "
Take me my knight, and set him up thereon,
And let the hangman shave his head quite clean,
And cut his ears off close up to the head ;
And cause the minstrels all the while to play
Soft music, and good singing ; for this day
Is my high day of triumph ; is it not,
Sir Lambert ?

SIR LAMBERT

Ah ! on your own blood,
Own name, you heap this foul disgrace ? you dare,
With hands and fame thus sullied, to go back
And take the Lady Alice—

SIR PETER

Say her name
Again, and you are dead, slain here by me.
Why should I talk with you, I'm master here,
And do not want your schooling ; is it not
My mercy that you are not dangling dead
There in the gateway with a broken neck ?

SIR LAMBERT

Such mercy ! why not kill me then outright ?
To die is nothing ; but to live that all
May point their fingers ! yea, I'd rather die.

JOHN CURZON

Why, will it make you any uglier man
To lose your ears ? they're much too big for you,
You ugly Judas !

SIR PETER

Hold, John ! [To Lambert.

That's your choice,
 To die, mind ! Then you shall die—Lambert mine,
 I thank you now for choosing this so well,
 It saves me much perplexity and doubt ;
 Perchance an ill deed too, for half I count
 This sparing traitors is an ill deed.

Well,

Lambert, die bravely, and we're almost friends.

SIR LAMBERT, *grovelling*

O God ! this is a fiend and not a man ;
 Will some one save me from him ? help, help, help !
 I will not die.

SIR PETER

Why, what is this I see ?

A man who is a knight, and bandied words
 So well just now with me, is lying down,
 Gone mad for fear like this ! So, so, you thought
 You knew the worst, and might say what you pleased.
 I should have guessed this from a man like you.
 Eh ! righteous Job would give up skin for skin,
 Yea, all a man can have for simple life,
 And we talk fine, yea, even a hound like this,
 Who needs must know that when he dies, deep hell
 Will hold him fast for ever—so fine we talk,
 " Would rather die "—all that. Now sir, get up !
 And choose again : shall it be head sans ears,
 Or trunk sans head ?

John Curzon, pull him up !

What, life then ? go and build the scaffold, John.

Lambert, I hope that never on this earth
 We meet again ; that you'll turn out a monk,
 And mend the life I give you, so farewell,
 I'm sorry you're a rascal. John, despatch.

In the French camp before the Castle

Sir Peter *prisoner*, Guesclin, Clisson, Sir Lambert

SIR PETER

So now is come the ending of my life ;
If I could clear this sickening lump away
That sticks in my dry throat, and say a word,
Guesclin might listen.

GUESCLIN

Tell me, fair sir knight,
If you have been clean liver before God,
And then you need not fear much ; as for me,
I cannot say I hate you, yet my oath,
And cousin Lambert's ears here clench the thing.

SIR PETER

I knew you could not hate me, therefore I
Am bold to pray for life ; 'twill harm your cause
To hang knights of good name, harm here in France
I have small doubt, at any rate hereafter
Men will remember you another way
Than I should care to be remembered, ah !
Although hot lead runs through me for my blood,
All this falls cold as though I said, " Sweet lords,
Give back my falcon ! "

See how young I am,
Do you care altogether more than France,
Say rather one French faction, than for all
The state of Christendom ? a gallant knight,
As (yea, by God !) I have been, is more worth
Than many castles ; will you bring this death,
For a mere act of justice, on my head ?

Think how it ends all, death ! all other things
Can somehow be retrieved, yea, send me forth

Naked and maimed, rather than slay me here ;
Then somehow will I get me other clothes,
And somehow will I get me some poor horse,
And, somehow clad in poor old rusty arms,
Will ride and smite among the serried glaives,
Fear not death so ; for I can tilt right well,
Let me not say " I could ; " I know all tricks,
That sway the sharp sword cunningly ; ah you,
You, my Lord Clisson, in the other days
Have seen me learning these, yea, call to mind,
How in the trodden corn by Chartres town,
When you were nearly swooning from the back
Of your black horse, those three blades slid at once
From off my sword's edge ; pray for me, my lord !

CLISSON

Nay, this is pitiful, to see him die.
My Lord the Constable, I pray you note
That you are losing some few thousand crowns
By slaying this man ; also think ; his lands
Along the Garonne river lie for leagues,
And are right rich, a many mills he has,
Three abbeyes of grey monks do hold of him,
Though wishing well for Clement, as we do ;
I know the next heir, his old uncle, well,
Who does not care two deniers for the knight
As things go now, but slay him, and then see,
How he will bristle up like any perch,
With curves of spears. What ! do not doubt, my lord,
You'll get the money, this man saved my life,
And I will buy him for two thousand crowns ;
Well, five then—eh ! what ! " No " again ? well then,
Ten thousand crowns ?

GUESCLIN

My sweet lord, much I grieve
I cannot please you, yea, good sooth, I grieve

This knight must die, as verily he must ;
For I have sworn it, so men take him out,
Use him not roughly.

SIR LAMBERT, *coming forward*

Music, do you know,
Music will suit you well, I think, because
You look so mild, like Laurence being grilled ;
Or perhaps music soft and slow, because
This is high day of triumph unto me,
Is it not, Peter ?

You are frightened, though,
Eh ! you are pale, because this hurts you much,
Whose life was pleasant to you, not like mine,
You ruined wretch ! Men mock me in the streets,
Only in whispers loud, because I am
Friend of the Constable ; will this please you,
Unhappy Peter ? once a-going home,
Without my servants, and a little drunk,
At midnight through the lone dim lamp-lit streets,
A whore came up and spat into my eyes,
(Rather to blind me than to make me see,)
But she was very drunk, and tottering back,
Even in the middle of her laughter, fell
And cut her head against the pointed stones,
While I leaned on my staff, and looked at her,
And cried, being drunk.

Girls would not spit at you,
You are so handsome, I think verily
Most ladies would be glad to kiss your eyes,
And yet you will be hung like a cur dog
Five minutes hence, and grow black in the face,
And curl your toes up. Therefore I am glad.

Guess why I stand and talk this nonsense now,
With Guesclin getting ready to play chess,
And Glisson doing something with his sword,

I can't see what, talking to Guesclin though,
I don't know what about, perhaps of you.
But, cousin Peter, while I stroke your beard,
Let me say this, I'd like to tell you now
That your life hung upon a game of chess,
That if, say, my squire Robert here should beat,
Why you should live, but hang if I beat him ;
Then guess, clever Peter, what I should do then ;
Well, give it up ? why, Peter, I should let
My squire Robert beat me, then you would think
That you were safe, you know ; Eh ? not at all,
But I should keep you three days in some hold,
Giving you salt to eat, which would be kind,
Considering the tax there is on salt ;
And afterwards should let you go, perhaps ?
No I should not, but I should hang you, sir,
With a red rope in lieu of mere grey rope.

But I forgot, you have not told me yet
If you can guess why I talk nonsense thus,
Instead of drinking wine while you are hanged ?
You are not quick at guessing, give it up.
This is the reason ; here I hold your hand,
And watch you growing paler, see you writhe,
And this, my Peter, is a joy so dear,
I cannot by all striving tell you how
I love it, nor I think, good man, would you
Quite understand my great delight therein ;
You, when you had me underneath you once,
Spat as it were, and said, " Go take him out,"
(That they might do that thing to me whereat,
E'en now this long time off I could well shriek,)
And then you tried forget I ever lived,
And sunk your hating into other things ;
While I—St. Dennis ! though, I think you'll faint,
Your lips are grey so ; yes, you will, unless
You let it out and weep like a hurt child ;
Hurrah ! you do now. Do not go just yet,

For I am Alice, am right like her now ;
Will you not kiss me on the lips, my love ?—

CLISSON

You filthy beast, stand back and let him go,
Or by God's eyes I'll choke you.

[*Kneeling to Sir Peter.*
Fair sir knight,

I kneel upon my knees and pray to you
That you would pardon me for this your death ;
God knows how much I wish you still alive,
Also how heartily I strove to save
Your life at this time ; yea, he knows quite well,
(I swear it, so forgive me !) how I would,
If it were possible, give up my life
Upon this grass for yours ; fair knight, although,
He knowing all things knows this thing too, well,
Yet when you see his face some short time hence,
Tell him I tried to save you.

SIR PETER

O ! my lord,
I cannot say this is as good as life,
But yet it makes me feel far happier now,
And if at all, after a thousand years,
I see God's face, I will speak loud and bold,
And tell Him you were kind, and like Himself ;
Sir, may God bless you !

Did you note how I
Fell weeping just now ? pray you, do not think
That Lambert's taunts did this, I hardly heard
The base things that he said, being deep in thought
Of all things that have happened since I was
A little child ; and so at last I thought
Of my true lady : truly, sir, it seemed
No longer gone than yesterday, that this
Was the sole reason God let me be born

Twenty-five years ago, that I might love
 Her, my sweet lady, and be loved by her ;
 This seemed so yesterday, to-day death comes,
 And is so bitter strong, I cannot see
 Why I was born.

But as a last request,
 I pray you, O kind Clisson, send some man,
 Some good man, mind you, to say how I died,
 And take my last love to her : fare-you-well,
 And may God keep you ; I must go now, lest
 I grow too sick with thinking on these things ;
 Likewise my feet are wearied of the earth,
 From whence I shall be lifted upright soon.

[*As he goes.*

Ah me ! shamed too, I wept at fear of death ;
 And yet not so, I only wept because
 There was no beautiful lady to kiss me
 Before I died, and sweetly wish good speed
 From her dear lips. O for some lady, though
 I saw her ne'er before ; Alice, my love,
 I do not ask for ; Clisson was right kind,
 If he had been a woman, I should die
 Without this sickness : but I am all wrong,
 So wrong and hopelessly afraid to die.
 There, I will go.

My God ! how sick I am,
 If only she could come and kiss me now.

The Hotel de la Barde, Bordeaux

*The LADY ALICE DE LA BARDE looking out of a window
 into the street*

No news yet ! surely, still he holds his own ;
 That garde stands well ; I mind me passing it
 Some months ago ; God grant the walls are strong !

I heard some knights say something yester-eve,
 I tried hard to forget : words far apart
 Struck on my heart ; something like this ; one said
 " What eh ! a Gascon with an English name,
 Harpdon ? " then nought, but afterwards, " Poictou."
 As one who answers to a question asked ;
 Then carelessly regretful came, " No, no."
 Whereto in answer loud and eagerly,
 One said, " Impossible ? Christ, what foul play ! "
 And went off angrily ; and while thenceforth
 I hurried gaspingly afraid, I heard,
 " Guesclin ; " " Five thousand men-at-arms ; " " Clisson."
 My heart misgives me it is all in vain
 I send these succours ; and in good time there !
 Their trumpet sounds, ah ! here they are ; good knights,
 God up in Heaven keep you.

If they come

And find him prisoner—for I can't believe
 Guesclin will slay him, even though they storm—
 (The last horse turns the corner.)

God in Heaven !

What have I got to thinking of at last !
 That thief I will not name is with Guesclin,
 Who loves him for his lands. My love ! my love !
 O, if I lose you after all the past,
 What shall I do ?

I cannot bear the noise

And light street out there, with this thought alive,
 Like any curling snake within my brain ;
 Let me just hide my head within these soft
 Deep cushions, there to try and think it out.

[Lying in the window-seat.]

I cannot hear much noise now, and I think
 That I shall go to sleep : it all sounds dim
 And faint, and I shall soon forget most things ;
 Yea, almost that I am alive and here ;
 It goes slow, comes slow, like a big mill-wheel
 On some broad stream, with long green weeds a-sway,

And soft and slow it rises and it falls,
Still going onward.

Lying so, one kiss,
And I should be in Avalon asleep,
Among the poppies, and the yellow flowers ;
And they should brush my cheek, my hair being spread
Far out among the stems ; soft mice and small
Eating and creeping all about my feet,
Red shod and tired ; and the flies should come
Creeping o'er my broad eyelids unafraid ;
And there should be a noise of water going,
Clear blue, fresh water breaking on the slates,
Likewise the flies should creep—God's eyes ! God help,
A trumpet ? I will run fast, leap adown
The slippery sea-stairs, where the crabs fight.

Ah !

I was half dreaming, but the trumpet's true,
He stops here at our house. The Clisson arms ?
Ah, now for news. But I must hold my heart,
And be quite gentle till he is gone out ;
And afterwards,—but he is still alive,
He must be still alive.

Enter a Squire of Clisson's

Good day, fair sir,
I give you welcome, knowing whence you come.

SQUIRE

My Lady Alice de la Barde, I come
From Oliver Clisson, knight and mighty lord,
Bringing you tidings : I make bold to hope
You will not count me villain, even if
They wring your heart ; nor hold me still in hate.
For I am but a mouthpiece after all,
A mouthpiece, too, of one who wishes well
To you and your's.

ALICE

Can you talk faster, sir,
Get over all this quicker ? fix your eyes
On mine, I pray you, and whate'er you see,
Still go on talking fast, unless I fall,
Or bid you stop.

SQUIRE.

I pray your pardon then,
And, looking in your eyes, fair lady, say
I am unhappy that your knight is dead.
Take heart, and listen ! let me tell you all.
We were five thousand goodly men-at-arms,
And scant five hundred had he in that hold ;
His rotten sand-stone walls were wet with rain,
And fell in lumps wherever a stone hit ;
Yet for three days about the barrier there
The deadly glaives were gathered, laid across,
And pushed and pulled ; the fourth our engines came ;
But still amid the crash of falling walls,
And roar of lombards, rattle of hard bolts,
The steady bow-strings flashed, and still streamed out
St. George's banner, and the seven swords,
And still they cried, " St. George Guienne," until
Their walls were flat as Jericho's of old,
And our rush came, and cut them from the keep.

ALICE

Stop, sir, and tell me if you slew him then,
And where he died, if you can really mean
That Peter Harpdon, the good knight, is dead ?

SQUIRE

Fair lady, in the base-court—

ALICE

What base-court ?

What do you talk of ? Nay, go on, go on ;
 'Twas only something gone within my head :
 Do you not know, one turns one's head round quick,
 And something cracks there with sore pain ? go on,
 And still look at my eyes.

SQUIRE

Almost alone,
 There in the base-court fought he with his sword,
 Using his left hand much, more than the wont
 Of most knights now-a-days ; our men gave back,
 For wheresoever he hit a downright blow,
 Some one fell bleeding, for no plate could hold
 Against the sway of body and great arm ;
 Till he grew tired, and some man (no ! not I,
 I swear not I, fair lady, as I live !)
 Thrust at him with a glaive between the knees,
 And threw him ; down he fell, sword undermost ;
 Many fell on him, crying out their cries,
 Tore his sword from him, tore his helm off, and—

ALICE

Yea, slew him ; I am much too young to live,
 Fair God, so let me die.

You have done well,
 Done all your message gently, pray you go,
 Our knights will make you cheer ; moreover, take
 This bag of franks for your expenses.

[*The Squire kneels.*
 But

You do not go ; still looking at my face,
 You kneel ! what, squire, do you mock me then ?
 You need not tell me who has set you on,
 But tell me only, 'tis a made-up tale.
 You are some lover may-be, or his friend ;
 Sir, if you loved me once, or your friend loved,
 Think, is it not enough that I kneel down

And kiss your feet, your jest will be right good
If you give in now, carry it too far,
And 'twill be cruel ; not yet ? but you weep
Almost, as though you loved me ; love me then,
And go to Heaven by telling all your sport,
And I will kiss you, then with all my heart,
Upon the mouth ; O ! what can I do then
To move you ?

SQUIRE

Lady fair, forgive me still !
You know I am so sorry, but my tale
Is not yet finished :

So they bound his hands,
And brought him tall and pale to Guesclin's tent,
Who, seeing him, leant his head upon his hand,
And pondered awhile, afterwards, looking up—
Fair dame, what shall I say ?

ALICE

Yea, I know now,
Good squire, you may go now with my thanks.

SQUIRE

Yet, lady, for your own sake I say this,
Yea, for my own sake, too, and Clisson's sake.
When Guesclin told him he must be hanged soon,
Within a while he lifted up his head
And spoke for his own life ; not crouching, though,
As abjectly afraid to die, nor yet
Sullenly brave as many a thief will die ;
Nor yet as one that plays at japes with God :
Few words he spoke ; not so much what he said
Moved us, I think, as, saying it, there played
Strange tenderness from that big soldier there
About his pleading ; eagerness to live
Because folk loved him, and he loved them back,
And many gallant plans unfinished now

For ever. Clisson's heart, which may God bless !
Was moved to pray for him, but all in vain ;
Wherefore I bring this message :

That he waits,
Still loving you, within the little church
Whose windows, with the one eye of the light
Over the altar, every night behold
The great dim broken walls he strove to keep !

There my Lord Clisson did his burial well.
Now, lady, I will go ; God give you rest !

ALICE

Thank Clisson from me, squire, and farewell !
And now to keep myself from going mad.
Christ ! I have been a many times to church,
And, ever since my mother taught me prayers,
Have used them daily, but to-day I wish
To pray another way ; come face to face,
O Christ, that I may clasp your knees and pray,
I know not what, at any rate come now
From one of many places where you are ;
Either in Heaven amid thick angel wings,
Or sitting on the altar strange with gems,
Or high up in the dustiness of the apse ;
Let us go, You and I, a long way off,
To the little damp, dark, Poitevin church ;
While you sit on the coffin in the dark,
Will I lie down, my face on the bare stone
Between your feet, and chatter anything
I have heard long ago, what matters it
So I may keep you there, your solemn face
And long hair even-flowing on each side,
Until you love me well enough to speak,
And give me comfort ; yea, till o'er your chin,
And cloven red beard the great tears roll down
In pity for my misery, and I die,
Kissed over by you.

Eh Guesclin ! if I were
Like Countess Mountfort now, that kissed the knight,
Across the salt sea come to fight for her ;
Ah ! just to go about with many knights,
Wherever you went, and somehow on one day,
In a thick wood to catch you off your guard,
Let you find, you and your some fifty friends,
Nothing but arrows wheresoe'er you turned,
Yea, and red crosses, great spears over them ;
And so, between a lane of my true men,
To walk up pale and stern and tall, and with
My arms on my surcoat, and his therewith,
And then to make you kneel, O knight Guesclin ;
And then—alas ! alas ! when all is said,
What could I do but let you go again,
Being pitiful woman ? I get no revenge,
Whatever happens ; and I get no comfort,
I am but weak, and cannot move my feet,
But as men bid me.

Strange I do not die.
Suppose this had not happened after all ;
I will lean out again and watch for news.

I wonder how long I can still feel thus,
As though I watched for news, feel as I did
Just half-an-hour ago, before this news.
How all the street is humming, some men sing,
And some men talk ; some look up at the house,
Then lay their heads together and look grave ;
Their laughter pains me sorely in the heart,
Their thoughtful talking makes my head turn round,
Yea, some men sing, what is it then they sing ?
Eh Launcelot, and love and fate and death ;
They ought to sing of him who was as wight
As Launcelot or Wade, and yet availed
Just nothing, but to fail and fail and fail,
And so at last to die and leave me here,
Alone and wretched ; yea, perhaps they will,

When many years are past, make songs of us ;
God help me, though, truly I never thought
That I should make a story in this way,
A story that his eyes can never see.

[One sings from outside.]

*Therefore be it believed
Whatsoever he grieved,
When his horse was relieved,
This Launcelot.*

*Beat down on his knee,
Right valiant was he
God's body to see,
Though he saw it not.*

*Right valiant to move,
But for his sad love
The high God above
Stinted his praise.*

*Yet so he was glad
That his son Lord Galahad
That high joyaunce had
All his life-days.*

*Sing we therefore then
Launcelot's praise again,
For he wan crownés ten,
If he wan not twelve.*

*To his death from his birth
He was muckle of worth,
Lay him in the cold earth,
A long grave ye may delve.*

*Omnes homines benedicite !
This last fitte ye may see,
All men pray for me,
Who made this history
Cunning and fairly.*

RAPUNZEL

THE PRINCE, *being in the wood near the tower,
in the evening*

I COULD not even think
What made me weep that day
When out of the council-hall
The courtiers passed away,—

THE WITCH

Rapunzel, Rapunzel,
Let down your hair !

RAPUNZEL

Is it not true that every day
She climbeth up the same strange way,
Her scarlet cloak spread broad and gay,
Over my golden hair ?

THE PRINCE

And left me there alone,
To think on what they said ;
“ Thou art a king’s own son,
’Tis fit that thou should’st wed.”

THE WITCH

Rapunzel, Rapunzel,
Let down your hair !

RAPUNZEL

When I undo the knotted mass,
Fathoms below the shadows pass
Over my hair along the grass.
O my golden hair !

THE PRINCE

I put my armour on,
Thinking on what they said ;
" Thou art a king's own son,
'Tis fit that thou should'st wed."

THE WITCH

Rapunzel, Rapunzel,
Let down your hair !

RAPUNZEL

See on the marble parapet
I lean my brow, strive to forget
That fathoms below my hair grows wet
With the dew, my golden hair.

THE PRINCE

I rode throughout the town,
Men did not bow the head,
Though I was the king's own son ;
" He rides to dream," they said.

THE WITCH

Rapunzel, Rapunzel,
Wind up your hair !

RAPUNZEL

See, on the marble parapet
The faint red stains with tears are wet ;

The long years pass, no help comes yet
To free my golden hair.

THE PRINCE

For leagues and leagues I rode,
Till hot my armour grew,
Till underneath the leaves
I felt the evening dew.

THE WITCH

Rapunzel, Rapunzel,
Weep through your hair !

RAPUNZEL

And yet—but I am growing old,
For want of love my heart is cold,
Years pass, the while I loose and fold
The fathoms of my hair.

THE PRINCE, *in the morning*

I have heard tales of men, who in the night
Saw paths of stars let down to earth from heaven,
Who followed them until they reached the light
Wherein they dwell, whose sins are all forgiven ;

But who went backward when they saw the gate
Of diamond, nor dared to enter in ;
All their life long they were content to wait,
Purging them patiently of every sin.

I must have had a dream of some such thing,
And now am just awaking from that dream ;
For even in grey dawn those strange words ring
Through heart and brain, and still I see that gleam.

For in my dream at sunset-time I lay
Beneath these beeches, mail and helmet off,

Right full of joy that I had come away
From court ; for I was patient of the scoff

That met me always there from day to day,
From any knave or coward of them all ;
I was content to live that wretched way ;
For truly till I left the council-hall,

And rode forth armed beneath the burning sun,
My gleams of happiness were faint and few,
But then I saw my real life had begun,
And that I should be strong quite well I knew.

For I was riding out to look for love,
Therefore the birds within the thickets sung,
Even in hot noontide, as I passed, above
The elms o'erswayed with longing towards me hung.

Now some few fathoms from the place where I
Lay in the beech-wood, was a tower fair,
The marble corners faint against the sky ;
And dreamily I wondered what lived there :

Because it seemed a dwelling for a queen,
No belfry for the swinging of great bells ;
No bolt or stone had ever crushed the green
Shafts, amber and rose walls, no soot that tells

Of the Norse torches burning up the roofs,
On the flower-carven marble could I see ;
But rather on all sides I saw the proofs
Of a great loneliness that sickened me ;

Making me feel a doubt that was not fear,
Whether my whole life long had been a dream,
And I should wake up soon in some place, where
The piled-up arms of the fighting angels gleam ;

Not born as yet, but going to be born,
 No naked baby as I was at first,
 But an armed knight, whom fire, hate and scorn
 Could turn from nothing : my heart almost burst

Beneath the beeches, as I lay a-dreaming,
 I tried so hard to read this riddle through,
 To catch some golden cord that I saw gleaming
 Like gossamer against the autumn blue.

But while I pondered these things, from the wood
 There came a black-haired woman, tall and bold,
 Who strode straight up to where the tower stood,
 And cried out shrilly words, whereon behold—

THE WITCH, *from the tower*
 Rapunzel, Rapunzel,
 Let down your hair !

THE PRINCE

Ah Christ ! it was no dream then, but there stood
 (She comes again) a maiden passing fair,
 Against the roof, with face turned to the wood,
 Bearing within her arms waves of her yellow hair.

I read my riddle when I saw her stand,
 Poor love ! her face quite pale against her hair,
 Praying to all the leagues of empty land
 To save her from the woe she suffered there.

To think ! they trod upon her golden hair
 In the witches' sabbaths ; it was a delight
 For these foul things, while she, with thin feet bare,
 Stood on the roof upon the winter night,

To plait her dear hair into many plaits,
 And then, while God's eye looked upon the thing,

In the very likenesses of Devil's bats,
Upon the ends of her long hair to swing.

And now she stood above the parapet,
And, spreading out her arms, let her hair flow,
Beneath that veil her smooth white forehead set
Upon the marble, more I do not know ;

Because before my eyes a film of gold
Floated, as now it floats. O, unknown love,
Would that I could thy yellow stair behold,
If still thou standest with lead roof above !

THE WITCH, *as she passes*

Is there any who will dare
To climb up the yellow stair,
Glorious Rapunzel's golden hair ?

THE PRINCE

If it would please God make you sing again,
I think that I might very sweetly die,
My soul somehow reach heaven in joyous pain,
My heavy body on the beech-nuts lie.

Now I remember ; what a most strange year,
Most strange and awful, in the beechen wood
I have passed now ; I still have a faint fear
It is a kind of dream not understood.

I have seen no one in this wood except
The witch and her ; have heard no human tones,
But when the witches' revelry has crept
Between the very jointing of my bones.

Ah ! I know now ; I could not go away,
But needs must stop to hear her sing that song

She always sings at dawning of the day.
I am not happy here, for I am strong.

And every morning do I whet my sword,
Yet Rapunzel still weeps within the tower,
And still God ties me down to the green sward,
Because I cannot see the gold stair floating lower.

RAPUNZEL sings from the tower

My mother taught me prayers
To say when I had need ;
I have so many cares,
That I can take no heed
Of many words in them ;
But I remember this :
Christ, bring me to thy bliss.
Mary, maid withouten wem,
Keep me ! I am lone, I wis,
Yet besides I have made this
By myself : *Give me a kiss,*
Dear God, dwelling up in heaven !
Also : *Send me a true knight,*
Lord Christ, with a steel sword, bright,
Broad, and trenchant ; yea, and seven
Spans from hilt to point, O Lord !
And let the handle of his sword
Be gold on silver, Lord in heaven !
Such a sword as I see gleam
Sometimes, when they let me dream.

Yea, besides, I have made this :
Lord, give Mary a dear kiss,
And let gold Michael, who looked down,
When I was there, on Rouen town
From the spire, bring me that kiss
On a lily ! Lord, do this !

These prayers on the dreadful nights

When the witches plait my hair,
 And the fearfulest of sights
 On the earth and in the air,
 Will not let me close my eyes,
 I murmur often, mixed with sighs,
 That my weak heart will not hold
 At some things that I behold.
 Nay, not sighs, but quiet groans,
 That swell out the little bones
 Of my bosom ; till a trance
 God sends in middle of that dance,
 And I behold the countenance
 Of Michael, and can feel no more
 The bitter east wind biting sore
 My naked feet ; can see no more
 The crayfish on the leaden floor,
 That mock with feeler and grim claw.

Yea, often in that happy trance,
 Beside the blessed countenance
 Of golden Michael, on the spire
 Glowing all crimson in the fire
 Of sunset, I behold a face,
 Which sometime, if God give me grace,
 May kiss me in this very place.

Evening in the tower

RAPUNZEL

It grows half way between the dark and light ;
 Love, we have been six hours here alone,
 I fear that she will come before the night,
 And if she finds us thus we are undone.

THE PRINCE

Nay, draw a little nearer, that your breath
 May touch my lips, let my cheek feel your arm ;

Now tell me, did you ever see a death,
Or ever see a man take mortal harm !

RAPUNZEL

Once came two knights and fought with swords below,
And while they fought I scarce could look at all,
My head swam so, after a moaning low
Drew my eyes down ; I saw against the wall

One knight lean dead, bleeding from head and breast,
Yet seemed it like a line of poppies red
In the golden twilight, as he took his rest,
In the dusky time he scarcely seemed dead.

But the other, on his face six paces off,
Lay moaning, and the old familiar name
He muttered through the grass, seemed like a scoff
Of some lost soul remembering his past fame.

His helm all dinted lay beside him there,
The visor-bars were twisted towards the face,
The crest, which was a lady very fair,
Wrought wonderfully, was shifted from its place.

The showered mail-rings on the speed-walk lay,
Perhaps my eyes were dazzled with the light
That blazed in the west, yet surely on that day
Some crimson thing had changed the grass from bright

Pure green I love so. But the knight who died
Lay there for days after the other went ;
Until one day I heard a voice that cried,
" Fair knight, I see Sir Robert we were sent

" To carry dead or living to the king."
So the knights came and bore him straight away

70 *Selections from William Morris*
On their lance truncheons, such a battered thing,
His mother had not known him on that day,

But for his helm-crest, a gold lady fair
Wrought wonderfully.

THE PRINCE

Ah, they were brothers then,
And often rode together, doubtless where
The swords were thickest, and were loyal men,
Until they fell in these same evil dreams.

RAPUNZEL

Yea, love ; but shall we not depart from hence ?
The white moon groweth golden fast, and gleams
Between the aspen stems ; I fear—and yet a sense

Of fluttering victory comes over me,
That will not let me fear aright ; my heart—
Feel how it beats, love, strives to get to thee,
I breathe so fast that my lips needs must part ;

Your breath swims round my mouth, but let us go.

THE PRINCE

I, Sebald, also, pluck from off the staff
The crimson banner, let it lie below,
Above it in the wind let grasses laugh.

Now let us go, love, down the winding stair,
With fingers intertwined ; ay, feel my sword !
I wrought it long ago, with golden hair
Flowing about the hilts, because a word,

Sung by a minstrel old, had set me dreaming
Of a sweet bowed-down face with yellow hair,

Betwixt green leaves I used to see it gleaming,
A half smile on the lips, though lines of care

Had sunk the cheeks, and made the great eyes hollow ;
What other work in all the world had I,
But through all turns of fate that face to follow ?
But wars and business kept me there to die.

O child, I should have slain my brother, too,
My brother, Love, lain moaning in the grass,
Had I not ridden out to look for you,
When I had watched the gilded courtiers pass

From the golden hall. But it is strange your name
Is not the same the minstrel sung of yore ;
You called it Rapunzel, 'tis not the name.
See, love, the stems shine through the open door.

Morning in the woods

RAPUNZEL

O Love ! me and my unknown name you have well won ;
The witch's name was Rapunzel ; eh ! not so sweet ?
No !—but is this real grass, love, that I tread upon ?
What call they these blue flowers that lean across my
feet ?

THE PRINCE

Dip down your dear face in the dewy grass, O love !
And ever let the sweet slim harebells, tenderly hung,
Kiss both your parted lips ; and I will hang above,
And try to sing that song the dreamy harper sung.

He sings

'Twixt the sunlight and the shade
Float up memories of my maid,
God, remember Guendolen !

Gold or gems she did not wear,
 But her yellow rippled hair,
 Like a veil, hid Guendolen !

'Twixt the sunlight and the shade,
 My rough hands so strangely made,
 Folded Golden Guendolen ;

Hands used to grip the sword-hilt hard,
 Framed her face, while on the sward,
 Tears fell down from Guendolen.

Guendolen now speaks no word,
 Hands fold round about the sword,
 Now no more of Guendolen.

Only 'twixt the light and shade
 Floating memories of my maid
 Make me pray for Guendolen.

GUENDOLEN

I kiss thee, new-found name ; but I will never go :
 Your hands need never grip the hammered sword again
 But all my golden hair shall ever round you flow,
 Between the light and shade from Golden Guendolen.

Afterwards, in the Palace

KING SEBALD

I took my armour off,
 Put on king's robes of gold,
 Over her kirtle green
 The gold fell fold on fold.

THE WITCH, *out of hell.*

*Guendolen ! Guendolen !
 One lock of hair !*

GUENDOLEN

I am so glad, for every day
He kisses me much the same way
As in the tower ; under the sway
Of all my golden hair.

KING SEBALD

We rode throughout the town,
A gold crown on my head,
Through all the gold-hung streets,
" Praise God ! " the people said.

THE WITCH

*Guendolen ! Guendolen !
Lend me your hair !*

GUENDOLEN

Verily, I seem like one
Who, when day is almost done,
Through a thick wood meets the sun
That blazes in her hair.

KING SEBALD

Yea, at the palace gates,
" Praise God ! " the great knights said,
" For Sebald the high king,
And the lady's golden head."

THE WITCH

*Woe is me ! Guendolen
Sweeps back her hair.*

GUENDOLEN

Nothing wretched now, no screams ;
I was unhappy once in dreams,

Selections from William Morris
And even now a harsh voice seems
To hang about my hair.

THE WITCH

WOE ! THAT ANY MAN COULD DARE
TO CLIMB UP THE YELLOW STAIR,
GLORIOUS GUENDOLEN'S GOLDEN HAIR.

SHAMEFUL DEATH

THERE were four of us about that bed ;
The mass-priest knelt at the side,
I and his mother stood at the head,
Over his feet lay the bride ;
We were quite sure that he was dead,
Though his eyes were open wide.

He did not die in the night,
He did not die in the day,
But in the morning twilight
His spirit passed away,
When neither sun nor moon was bright,
And the trees were merely grey.

He was not slain with the sword,
Knight's axe, or the knightly spear,
Yet spoke he never a word
After he came in here ;
I cut away the cord
From the neck of my brother dear.

He did not strike one blow,
For the recreants came behind,
In a place where the hornbeams grow
A path right hard to find,

For the hornbeam boughs swing so,
That the twilight makes it blind.

They lighted a great torch then,
When his arms were pinioned fast,
Sir John the knight of the Fen,
Sir Guy of the Dolorous Blast,
With knights threescore and ten,
Hung brave Lord Hugh at last.

I am threescore and ten,
And my hair is all turned grey,
But I met Sir John of the Fen
Long ago on a summer day,
And am glad to think of the moment when
I took his life away.

I am threescore and ten,
And my strength is mostly passed,
But long ago I and my men,
When the sky was overcast,
And the smoke rolled over the reeds of the fen,
Slew Guy of the Dolorous Blast.

And now, knights all of you,
I pray you pray for Sir Hugh,
A good knight and a true,
And for Alice, his wife, pray too.

THE HAYSTACK IN THE FLOODS

HAD she come all the way for this,
To part at last without a kiss?
Yea, had she borne the dirt and rain
That her own eyes might see him slain
Beside the haystack in the floods?

Along the dripping leafless woods,
The stirrup touching either shoe,
She rode astride as troopers do ;
With kirtle kilted to her knee,
To which the mud splashed wretchedly ;
And the wet dripped from every tree
Upon her head and heavy hair,
And on her eyelids broad and fair ;
The tears and rain ran down her face.

By fits and starts they rode apace,
And very often was his place
Far off from her ; he had to ride
Ahead, to see what might betide
When the roads crossed ; and sometimes, when
There rose a murmuring from his men,
Had to turn back with promises ;
Ah me ! she had but little ease ;
And often for pure doubt and dread
She sobbed, made giddy in the head
By the swift riding : while, for cold,
Her slender fingers scarce could hold
The wet reins ; yea, and scarcely, too,
She felt the foot within her shoe
Against the stirrup : all for this,
To part at last without a kiss
Beside the haystack in the floods.

For when they neared that old soaked hay
They saw across the only way
That Judas, Godmar, and the three
Red running lions dismally
Grinned from his pennon, under which,
In one straight line along the ditch,
They counted thirty heads.

So then,
While Robert turned round to his men,

She saw at once the wretched end,
And, stooping down, tried hard to rend
Her coif the wrong way from her head,
And hid her eyes ; while Robert said :
“ Nay, love, 'tis scarcely two to one,
At Poitiers where we made them run
So fast—why, sweet my love, good cheer
The Gascon frontier is so near,
Nought after this.”

But, “ O,” she said,
“ My God ! my God ! I have to tread
The long way back without you ; then
The court at Paris ; those six men ;
The gratings of the Chatelet ;
The swift Seine on some rainy day
Like this, and people standing by,
And laughing, while my weak hands try
To recollect how strong men swim.
All this, or else a life with him,
For which I should be damned at last,
Would God that this next hour were past ! ”

He answered not, but cried his cry,
“ St. George for Marny ! ” cheerily ;
And laid his hand upon her rein.
Alas ! no man of all his train
Gave back that cheery cry again ;
And, while for rage his thumb beat fast
Upon his sword-hilt, some one cast
About his neck a kerchief long,
And bound him.

Then they went along
To Godmar ; who said : “ Now, Jehane
Your lover's life is on the wane
So fast, that, if this very hour
You yield not as my paramour,

He will not see the rain leave off—
Nay, keep your tongue from gibe and scoff,
Sir Robert, or I slay you now."

She laid her hand upon her brow,
Then gazed upon the palm, as though
She thought her forehead bled, and—"No"
She said, and turned her head away,
As there were nothing else to say,
And everything were settled: red
Grew Godmar's face from chin to head:
"Jehane, on yonder hill there stands
My castle, guarding well my lands:
What hinders me from taking you,
And doing that I list to do
To your fair wilful body, while
Your knight lies dead?"

A wicked smile

Wrinkled her face, her lips grew thin,
A long way out she thrust her chin:
"You know that I should strangle you
While you were sleeping; or bite through
Your throat, by God's help—ah!" she said,
"Lord Jesus, pity your poor maid!
For in such wise they hem me in,
I cannot choose but sin and sin,
Whatever happens: yet I think
They could not make me eat or drink,
And so should I just reach my rest."
"Nay, if you do not my behest,
O Jehane! though I love you well,"
Said Godmar, "would I fail to tell
All that I know." "Foul lies," she said.
"Eh? lies my Jehane? by God's head,
At Paris folks would deem them true!
Do you know, Jehane, they cry for you,
'Jehane the brown! Jehane the brown!
Give us Jehane to burn or drown!'—"

Eh—gag me, Robert !—sweet my friend,
This were indeed a piteous end
For those long fingers, and long feet,
And long neck, and smooth shoulders sweet ;
An end that few men would forget
That saw it—So, an hour yet :
Consider, Jehane, which to take
Of life or death ! ”

So, scarce awake,
Dismounting, did she leave that place,
And totter some yards : with her face
Turned upward to the sky she lay,
Her head on a wet heap of hay,
And fell asleep : and while she slept,
And did not dream, the minutes crept
Round to the twelve again ; but she,
Being waked at last, sighed quietly,
And strangely childlike came, and said :
“ I will not.” Straightway Godmar’s head,
As though it hung on strong wires, turned
Most sharply round, and his face burned.

For Robert—both his eyes were dry,
He could not weep, but gloomily
He seemed to watch the rain ; yea, too,
His lips were firm ; he tried once more
To touch her lips ; she reached out, sore
And vain desire so tortured them,
The poor grey lips, and now the hem
Of his sleeve brushed them.

With a start
Up Godmar rose, thrust them apart ;
From Robert’s throat he loosed the bands
Of silk and mail ; with empty hands
Held out, she stood and gazed, and saw,
The long bright blade without a flaw

Glide out from Godmar's sheath, his hand
In Robert's hair ; she saw him bend
Back Robert's head ; she saw him send
The thin steel down ; the blow told well,
Right backward the knight Robert fell,
And moaned as dogs do, being half dead,
Unwitting, as I deem : so then
Godmar turned grinning to his men,
Who ran, some five or six, and beat
His head to pieces at their feet.

Then Godmar turned again and said :
" So, Jehane, the first fitte is read !
Take note, my lady, that your way
Lies backward to the Chatelet ! "
She shook her head and gazed awhile
At her cold hands with a rueful smile,
As though this thing had made her mad.

This was the parting that they had
Beside the haystack in the floods.

TWO RED ROSES ACROSS THE MOON

THERE was a lady lived in a hall,
Large in the eyes, and slim and tall ;
And ever she sung from noon to noon,
Two red roses across the moon.

There was a knight came riding by
In early spring, when the roads were dry ;
And he heard that lady sing at the noon,
Two red roses across the moon.

Yet none the more he stopped at all,
But he rode a-gallop past the hall ;

And left that lady singing at noon,
Two red roses across the moon.

Because, forsooth, the battle was set,
And the scarlet and blue had got to be met,
He rode on the spur till the next warm noon :—
Two red roses across the moon.

But the battle was scattered from hill to hill,
From the windmill to the watermill ;
And he said to himself, as it neared the noon,
Two red roses across the moon.

You scarce could see for the scarlet and blue,
A golden helm or a golden shoe ;
So he cried, as the fight grew thick at the noon,
Two red roses across the moon !

Verily then the gold bore through
The huddled spears of the scarlet and blue ;
And they cried, as they cut them down at the noon,
Two red roses across the moon !

I trow he stopped when he rode again
By the hall, though draggled sore with the rain ;
And his lips were pinched to kiss at the noon
Two red roses across the moon.

Under the may she stooped to the crown,
All was gold, there was nothing of brown ;
And the horns blew up in the hail at noon,
Two red roses across the moon.

WELLAND RIVER

FAIR Ellayne she walked by Welland river,
Across the lily lee :
O, gentle Sir Robert, ye are not kind
To stay so long at sea.

Over the marshland none can see
Your scarlet pennon fair ;
O, leave the Easterlings alone,
Because of my golden hair.

The day when over Stamford bridge
That dear pennon I see
Go up toward the goodly street,
'Twill be a fair day for me.

O, let the bonny pennon bide
At Stamford, the good town,
And let the Easterlings go free,
And their ships go up and down.

For every day that passes by
I wax both pale and green,
From gold to gold of my girdle
There is an inch between.

I sewed it up with scarlet silk
Last night upon my knee,
And my heart grew sad and sore to think
Thy face I'd never see.

I sewed it up with scarlet silk,
As I lay upon my bed :
Sorrow ! the man I'll never see
That had my maidenhead.

But as Ellayne sat on her window-seat
And combed her yellow hair,
She saw come over Stamford bridge
The scarlet pennon fair.

As Ellayne lay and sickened sore,
The gold shoes on her feet,
She saw Sir Robert and his men
Ride up the Stamford street.

He had a coat of fine red gold,
And a bascinet of steel ;
Take note his goodly Collayne sword
Smote the spur upon his heel.

And by his side, on a grey jennet,
There rode a fair lady,
For every ruby Ellayne wore,
I count she carried three.

Say, was not Ellayne's gold hair fine,
That fell to her middle free ?
But that lady's hair down in the street,
Fell lower than her knee.

Fair Ellayne's face, from sorrow and grief,
Was waxen pale and green :
That lady's face was goodly red,
She had but little tene.

But as he passed by her window
He grew a little wroth :
O, why does yon pale face look at me
From out the golden cloth ?

It is some burd, the fair dame said
That aye rode him beside,

Has come to see your bonny face
This merry summer-tide.

But Ellayne let a lily-flower
Light on his cap of steel :
O, I have gotten two hounds, fair knight,
The one has served me well.

But the other, just an hour ago,
Has come from over sea,
And all his fell is sleek and fine,
But little he knows of me.

Now, which shall I let go, fair knight,
And which shall bide with me ?
O, lady, have no doubt to keep
The one that best loveth thee.

O, Robert, see how sick I am !
Ye do not so by me.
Lie still, fair love ! have ye gotten harm
While I was on the sea ?

Of one gift, Robert, that ye gave,
I sicken to the death,
I pray you nurse-tend me, my knight,
Whiles that I have my breath.

Six fathoms from the Stamford bridge
He left that dame to stand,
And whiles she wept, and whiles she cursed
That she ever had taken land,

He has kissed sweet Ellayne on the mouth,
And fair she fell asleep,
And long and long days after that
Sir Robert's house she did keep.

RIDING TOGETHER

For many, many days together
The wind blew steady from the East ;
For many days hot grew the weather,
About the time of our Lady's Feast.

For many days we rode together,
Yet met we neither friend nor foe ;
Hotter and clearer grew the weather,
Steadily did the East wind blow.

We saw the trees in the hot, bright weather,
Clear-cut, with shadows very black,
As freely we rode on together
With helms unlaced and bridles slack.

And often, as we rode together,
We, looking down the green-banked stream,
Saw flowers in the sunny weather,
And saw the bubble-making bream.

And in the night lay down together,
And hung above our heads the rood,
Or watched night-long in the dewy weather,
The while the moon did watch the wood.

Our spears stood bright and thick together,
Straight out the banners streamed behind,
As we galloped on in the sunny weather,
With faces turned towards the wind.

Down sank our threescore spears together,
As thick we saw the pagans ride ;
His eager face in the clear fresh weather,
Shone out that last time by my side.

Up the sweep of the bridge we dashed together,
It rocked to the crash of the meeting spears,
Down rained the buds of the dear spring weather,
The elm-tree flowers fell like tears.

There, as we rolled and writhed together,
I threw my arms above my head,
For close by my side, in the lovely weather,
I saw him reel and fall back dead.

I and the slayer met together,
He waited the death-stroke there in his place,
With thoughts of death, in the lovely weather,
Gapingly mazed at my maddened face.

Madly I fought as we fought together ;
In vain : the little Christian band
The pagans drowned, as in stormy weather,
The river drowns low-lying land.

They bound my blood-stained hands together,
They bound his corpse to nod by my side :
Then on we rode, in the bright March weather,
With clash of cymbals did we ride.

We ride no more, no more together ;
My prison-bars are thick and strong,
I take no heed of any weather,
The sweet Saints grant I live not long.

SUMMER DAWN

PRAY but one prayer for me 'twixt thy closed lips,
Think but one thought of me up in the stars.
The summer night waneth, the morning light slips,
Faint and grey 'twixt the leaves of the aspen, betwixt
the cloud-bars,

That are patiently waiting there for the dawn :
Patient and colourless, though Heaven's gold
Waits to float through them along with the sun.
Far out in the meadows, above the young corn,
The heavy elms wait, and restless and cold
The uneasy wind rises ; the roses are dun ;
Through the long twilight they pray for the dawn,
Round the lone house in the midst of the corn.
Speak but one word to me over the corn,
Over the tender, bowed locks of the corn.

SELECTED BOOKS FROM
THE LIFE AND DEATH OF JASON

ARGUMENT

JASON, the son of Æson, king of Iolchos, having come to man's estate, demanded of Pelias his father's kingdom, which he held wrongfully. But Pelias answered, that if he would bring from Colchis the golden fleece of the ram that had carried Phryxus thither, he would yield him his right. Whereon Jason sailed to Colchis in the ship Argo, with other heroes, and by means of Medea, the king's daughter, won the fleece; and carried off also Medea; and so, after many troubles, came back to Iolchos again. There, by Medea's wiles, was Pelias slain; but Jason went to Corinth, and lived with Medea happily, till he was taken with the love of Glauké, the king's daughter of Corinth, and must needs wed her; whom also Medea destroyed, and fled to Ægeus at Athens; and not long after Jason died strangely.

BOOK I

IN Thessaly, beside the tumbling sea,
Once dwelt a folk, men called the Minyæ ;
For, coming from Orchomenus the old,
Bearing their wives and children, beasts and gold,
Through many a league of land they took their way,
And stopped at last, where in a sunny bay
The green Anaurus cleaves the white sea-sand,
And eastward inland doth Mount Pelion stand,
Where bears and wolves the centaurs' arrows find ;
And southward is a gentle sea and kind,
Nigh landlocked, peopled with all kinds of fish,
And the good land yields all that man can wish.

So there they built Iolchos, that each day
Grew great, until all these were passed away,
With many another, and Cretheus the king
Had died, and left his crown and everything
To Æson, his own son by fair Tyro ;
Whom, in unhappy days and long ago,
A God had loved, whose son was Pelias.

And so, within a while, it came to pass
This Pelias, being covetous and strong
And full of wiles, and deeming nought was wrong
That wrought him good, thrust Æson from his throne,
And over all the Minyæ reigned alone ;
While Æson, like a poor and feeble lord,
Dwelt in Iolchos still, nor was his word
Regarded much by any man therein,
Nor did men labour much his praise to win.

Now 'mid all this a fair young son he had ;
And when his state thus fell from good to bad
He thought, Though Pelias leave me now alone,
Yet he may wish to make quite sure his throne
By slaying me and mine, some evil day ;
Therefore the child will I straight send away,
Ere Pelias feels his high seat tottering,
And gets to know the terrors of a king,
That blood alone can deaden. Therewithal
A faithful slave unto him did he call,
And bade him from his nurses take the child
And bear him forth unto the forest wild
About the foot of Pelion : There should he
Blow loudly on a horn of ivory
That Æson gave him ; then would come to him
A Centaur, grave of face and large of limb,
Before whom he should fall upon his knees
And, holding forth the child, say words like these :
“ O my lord Cheiron, Æson sends me here
To say, if ever you have held him dear,
Take now this child, his son, and rear him up
Till we have fully drained the bitter cup
The fates have filled for us ; and if times change
While through the peaceful oakwood here you range,
And the crown comes upon the youngling's head,
Then, though a king right fair apparelled,
Yet unto you shall he be but a slave,
Since now from fear his tender years you save ; ”
“ And then,” quoth Æson, “ all these words being said,
Hold out this ring, set with a ruby red,
Adorned with dainty little images,
And this same horn, whereon, 'twixt carven trees,
Diana follows up the flying hart ;
They shall be signs of truth upon your part.
Then leave the child with him, and come to me,
Minding what words the Centaur saith to thee ;
Of whom thou needest have no whit of fear ;
And, ere thou goest, bring me the child here.”

Then went the man and came again to him
With Jason, who was strong and large of limb
As for his years, and now upon his feet
Went firmly, and began to feel life sweet,
And longed for this and that, and on his tongue,
Bewildered, half articulate, speech hung.

But Æson, when he saw the sturdy boy,
His fair round limbs and face lit up with joy
Of very life, sighed deeply, and he said :
“ O child, I pray the Gods to spare thine head
The burden of a crown ; were it not good
That thou shouldst live and die within this wood
That clothes the feet of Pelion, knowing nought
Of all the things by foolish men so sought ;
For there, no doubt, is everything man needs,—
The quiver, with the iron-pointed reeds,
The cornel bow, the wood-knife at the side,
The garments of the spotted leopard's hide,
The bed of bear-skin in the hollow hill,
The bath within the pool of some green rill ;
There shall the quick-eyed centaurs be thy friends,
Unto whose hearts such wisdom great Jove sends
They know the past and future, and fear nought
That by the fates upon them may be brought.
And when the spring brings love, then mayst thou find,
In some fair grassy place, the wood-nymphs kind,
And choose thy mate, and with her, hand in hand,
Go wandering through the blossoming sweet land ;
And nought of evil there shall come to thee,
But like the golden age shall all things be ;
And when upon thee falls the fated day,
Fearless and painless shalt thou pass away.”
So spoke he foolishly, nor knew indeed
How many hearts his son should make to bleed,
How many griefs his head, whitened with care
Long ere its time, before his death should bear.
Now, since the moonless night and dark was come,
Time was it that the child should leave his home ;

And saddled in the court the stout horse stood
That was to bear them to the Centaur's wood ;
And the tried slave stood ready by his lord,
With wallet on his back, and sharpened sword
Girt to his side ; to whom the horn and ring,
Fit for the belt and finger of a king,
Did Æson give, and therewith kissed the boy,
Who with his black beard played, and laughed for joy
To see the war-horse in the red torch-light.
Then, being mounted, forth into the night
They rode, and thus has Jason left his home.

All night they rode, and at the dawn, being come
Unto the outskirts of the forest wild,
They left the horse, and the still sleeping child
The slave bore in his arms, until they came
Unto the place where, living free from blame,
Cheiron the old roamed through the oaken wood ;
There by a flowering thorn-bush the slave stood,
And set the little Jason on the ground ;
Who, waking from sweet sleep, looked all around
And 'gan to prattle ; but his guardian drew
The horn from off his neck, and thereon blew
A point of hunting known to two or three,
That sounded through the forest merrily,
Then waited listening.

And meantime the sun,
Come from Eubœan cliffs, had just begun
To light the high tips of the forest grass,
And in the thorns the blackbird singing was ;
But 'mid his noise the listening man could hear
The sound of hoofs, whereat a little fear
He felt within his heart, and heeded nought
The struggling of the child, who ever sought
To gain the horn all glittering of gold,
Wrought by the cunning Dædalus of old.

But louder still the noise he hearkened grew,
Until at last in sight the Centaur drew,

A mighty grey horse, trotting down the glade,
Over whose back the long grey locks were laid,
That from his reverend head abroad did flow ;
For to the waist was man, but all below
A mighty horse, once roan, now well-nigh white
With lapse of years ; with oak-wreaths was he dight
Where man joined unto horse, and on his head
He wore a gold crown, set with rubies red,
And in his hand he bare a mighty bow,
No man could bend of those that battle now.

So, when he saw him coming through the trees,
The trembling slave sunk down upon his knees
And put the child before him ; but Cheiron,
Who knew all things, cried : " Man with Æson's son,
Thou needest not to tell me who thou art,
Nor will I fail to do to him my part :
A vain thing were it, truly, if I strove,
Such as I am, against the will of Jove.
Lo now, this youngling, set 'twixt thee and me,
In days to come a mighty man shall be,
Well-nigh the mightiest of all those that dwell
Between Olympus and Malea ; and well
Shall Juno love him till he come to die.

" Now get thee to thy master presently,
But leave with me the red ring and the horn,
That folk may know of whom this boy was born
In days to come, when he shall leave this wild :
And lay between my arms the noble child."

So the slave joyful, but still half afraid,
Within the mighty arms young Jason laid,
And gave up both the horn and the red ring
Unto the Centaur, who the horn did sling
About him ; on his finger, with a smile,
Setting the ring ; and in a little while
The slave departing, reached the open plain,
And straight he mounted on his horse again,
And rode on toward Iolchos all the day,
And as the sunset darkened every way,

He reached the gates, and coming to his lord,
Bid him rejoice, and told him every word
That Cheiron said. Right glad was Æson then
That from his loins a great man among men
Should thus have sprung ; and so he passed his days
Full quietly, remote from fear or praise.

And now was Pelias mindful of the day
When from the altar's horns he drew away
Sidero's cruel hands, while Neleus smote
The golden-hilted sword into her throat,
And without fire, or barley-cake, or cup,
No pleasing victim, she was offered up
In Juno's temple ; so he feared that he,
Though sprung from him who rules the restless sea,
Should meet an evil fate at Juno's hands :
Therefore he sent for men from many lands,
Marble and wood, and gold and brass enow,
And day by day, with many a sounding blow,
The masons wrought, until at last was reared
A temple to the Goddess that he feared ;—
A wonder among temples, for the stone
That made it, and the gold that therein shone.
And in the midst her image Pelias set,
Wrought cunningly of purest gold, which yet
Had served him better in his treasury,
So little store the Goddess set thereby.

Moreover to Dodona, where the doves
Amid the oak-trees murmur of their loves,
He sent a messenger to know his fate ;
Who, up the temple steps, beneath the weight
Of precious things went bending ; and being come
Back from the north to his Thessalian home,
Gave forth this answer to the doubtful king :—

“ O Pelias, fearful of so many a thing,
Sit merry o'er thy wine, sleep safe and soft,
Within thy golden bed ; for surely oft
The snows shall fall before the half-shod man

Can come upon thee through the water wan."

So at this word the king along the shore
Built many a tower, and still more and more
Drew men unto him skilled in spear and bow ;
And through the streets full often would he go
Beset with guards, and for the rest began
To be a terror unto every man.

And yet indeed were all these things but vain,
For at the foot of Pelion grew his bane
In strength and comeliness from day to day,
And swiftly passed his childish years away :
Unto whom Cheiron taught the worthy lore
Of elders who the wide world filled before ;
And how to forge his iron arrow-heads,
And how to find within the marshy steads
The stoutest reeds, and from some slain birds' wing
To feather them, and make a deadly thing ;
And through the woods he took him, nor would spare
To show him how the just-awakened bear
Came hungry from his tree, or show him how
The spotted leopard's lurking-place to know ;
And many a time they brought the hart to bay,
Or smote the boar at hottest of the day.

Now was his dwelling-place a fair-hewn cave,
Facing the south : thereto the herdsmen drave
Full oft to Cheiron woolly sheep, and neat,
And brought him wine and garden-honey sweet,
And fruits that flourish well in the fat plain,
And cloth and linen, and would take again
Skins of slain beasts, and little lumps of gold,
Washed from the high crags : then would Cheiron hold,
Upon the sunny lawns, high feast with them,
And garland all about the ancient stem
Of some great tree, and there do sacrifice
Unto the Gods, and with grave words and wise
Tell them sweet tales of elders passed away :
But for some wished thing every man would pray

Or ever in their hands the steel did shine,
And or the sun lit up the bubbling wine ;
Then would they fall to meat, nor would they leave
Their joyances, until the dewy eve
Had given good heart unto the nightingale
To tell the sleepy wood-nymphs all his tale.

Moreover, Cheiron taught him how to cast
His hand across the lyre, until there passed
Such sweetness through the woods, that all about
The wood-folk gathered, and the merry rout
That called on Bacchus, hearkening, stayed awhile,
And in the chase the hunter, with a smile,
From his raised hand let fall the noisy horn,
When to his ears the sweet strange sound was borne.

But in the night-time once did Jason wake,
And seem to see the moonlit branches shake
With huge, unwonted clamour of the chase ;
Then up he sprung, but ere he went one pace
Unto the cave's mouth, Cheiron raised his arm
And drew him back, and said : " Surely, no charm
Thou hast, my son, against Diana's sight,
Who over Pelion goes abroad this night ;
Now let those go to her that she doth call,
Because no fenced town, brazen gate or wall,
No coat of mail, or seven-folded shield,
Can guard thee from the wound that ne'er is healed,
When she is angry. Sleep again, my son,
Nor wish to spoil great deeds not yet begun."

Then Jason lay and trembled, while the sound
Grew louder through the moonlit woods around,
And died off slowly, going toward the sea,
Leaving the fern-owl wailing mournfully.

Thereafter wandering lonely did he meet
A maid, with girt-up gown and sandalled feet,
Who joyously through flowering grass did go,
Holding within her hand an unstrung bow ;
And, setting eyes on her, he thought, indeed,
This must be she that made Actæon bleed ;

For, certes, ere that day he had not seen
Within that wild, one made so like a queen.

So, doubtful, he held back, nor dared to love
Her rosy feet, or ivory knees above,
And, with half-lifted eyes, could scarcely dare
To gaze upon her eyes or golden hair,
Or hidden bosom : but she called aloud,—
“ Tell me, fair youth, if thou hast seen a crowd
Of such as I go through these woods to-day ? ”
And when his stammering tongue no word could say,
She smiled upon him, and said, “ Who art thou,
Who seemest fitter from some galley’s prow
To lead the heroes on the merchant-town,
Than through the wilds to hunt the poor beasts down,
Or underneath the canopy to sit,
Than by the beech to watch the cushat flit ?
Speak out, and fear not.”

“ O, my queen ! ” said he,
“ Fair Goddess, as thou seemest well to be,
Give me good days and peace, and fair girl’s love,
And let great kings send out their sons to rove ;
But as for me, my name is little known,
I am but Jason, who dwell here alone
With Cheiron in the hollow mountain-side,
Wishful for happy days, whate’er betide.”

“ Jason,” she said, “ all folk shall know thy name,
For verily the Gods shall give thee fame,
Whatever they keep back from thee : behold
Restless thou shalt be, as thou now art bold,
And cunning, as thou now art skilled to watch
The crafty bear, and in the toils to catch
The grey-maned yellow lion ; and now see
Thou doest my commands, for certainly
I am no mortal ; so to Cheiron tell
No longer is it fitting thou shouldst dwell
Here in the wilds, but in a day or two,
Clad in Magnesian garments, shalt thou go
Unto Iolchos, and there claim thine own.

And unto thee shall Cheiron first make known
The story of thy father and thy kin,
That thou mayst know what right thou hast herein.
And say to him, I bid him do this thing,
By this same token, that the silver ring
Upon my altar, with Sidero's blood
Is spotted still, and that the half-charred wood
My priests had lighted early on that day,
Yet lies thereon, by no flame burnt away."
Then Jason fell a-trembling, and to him
The tall green stems grew wavering and dim ;
And when a fresh gust of the morning breeze
Came murmuring along the forest trees,
And woke him as from dreaming, all alone
He stood, and with no farewell she was gone,
Leaving no traces of her dainty feet.

But through the leaves ambrosial odours sweet
Yet floated as he turned to leave the place,
And with slow steps, and thinking on his case,
Went back to Cheiron, whom he found laid there,
Half sleeping on the thymy herbage fair,
To whom he told the things that he had heard,
With flushed and eager face, for they had stirred
New thoughts within him of the days to come,
So that he longed to leave his woodland home.

Then Cheiron said : " O, fair son, thou shalt go,
Since now, at last, the Gods will have it so :
And know that, till thou comest to the end
Of thy loved life, shall Juno be thy friend,
Because the lovely huntress thou did see
Late in the greenwood certainly was she
Who sits in heaven beside Almighty Jove,
And noble things they do that have her love.

" Now, son, to-day I rede thee not to go,
Nor yet to-morrow, for clouds great and slow
Are gathering round the hill-tops, and I think
The thirsty fields full many a draught will drink ;
Therefore to-day our cups shall not be dry,

But we will sit together, thou and I,
And tales of thy forefathers shalt thou hear,
And many another, till the heavens clear."

So was it as the Centaur said ; for soon
The woods grew dark, as though they knew no noon ;
The thunder growled about the high brown hills,
And the thin, wasted, shining summer rills
Grew joyful with the coming of the rain,
And doubtfully was shifting every vane
On the town spires, with changing gusts of wind ;
Till came the storm-blast, furious and blind,
'Twixt gorges of the mountains, and drove back
The light sea breeze ; then waxed the heavens black,
Until the lightning leapt from cloud to cloud,
With clattering thunder, and the piled-up crowd
Began to turn from steely blue to grey,
And toward the sea the thunder drew away,
Leaving the north-wind blowing steadily
The rain clouds from Olympus ; while the sea
Seemed mingled with the low clouds and the rain :
And one might think that never now again
The sunny grass would make a pleasant bed
For tired limbs, and dreamy, languid head
Of sandalled nymph, forewearied with the chase.

Meantime, within a pleasant lighted place,
Stretched upon warm skins, did the Centaur lie,
And nigh him Jason, listening eagerly
The tales he told him, asking, now and then,
Strange questions of the race of vanished men :
Nor were the wine-cups idle ; till at last
Desire of sleep over their bodies passed,
And in their dreamless rest the wind in vain
Howled round about, with washing of the rain.

BOOK II

So there they lay until the second dawn
Broke fair and fresh o'er glittering glade and lawn ;
Then Jason rose, and did on him a fair
Blue woollen tunic, such as folk do wear
On the Magnesian cliffs, and at his thigh
An iron-hilted sword hung carefully ;
And on his head he had a russet hood ;
And in his hand two spears of cornel-wood,
Well steeled and bound with brazen bands he shook.

Then from the Centaur's hands at last he took
The tokens of his birth, the ring and horn,
And so stept forth into the sunny morn,
And bade farewell to Cheiron, and set out
With eager heart, that held small care or doubt.

So lightly through the well-known woods he passed,
And came out to the open plain at last,
And went till night came on him, and then slept
Within a homestead that a poor man kept ;
And rose again at dawn, and slept that night
Nigh the Anaurus, and at morrow's light
Rose up and went unto the river's brim ;
But fearful seemed the passage unto him,
For swift and yellow drave the stream adown
'Twixt crumbling banks ; and tree-trunks rough and
brown

Whirled in the bubbling eddies here and there ;
So swollen was the stream a maid might dare
To cross, in fair days, with unwetted knee.

Then Jason with his spear-shaft carefully
Sounded the depth, nor any bottom found ;
And wistfully he cast his eyes around
To see if help was nigh, and heard a voice
Behind him, calling out, " Fair youth, rejoice
That I am here to help, or certainly
Long time a dweller hereby shouldst thou be."

Then Jason turned round quickly, and beheld
A woman, bent with burdens and with eld,
Grey and broad shouldered ; so he laughed, and said :
“ O mother, wilt thou help me ? by my head,
More help than thine I need upon this day.”
“ O son,” she said, “ needs must thou on thy way ;
And is there any of the giants here
To bear thee through this water without fear ?
Take, then, the help a God has sent to thee,
For in mine arms a small thing shalt thou be.”

So Jason laughed no more, because a frown
Gathered upon her brow, as she cast down
Her burden to the earth and came a-nigh,
And raised him in her long arms easily,
And stept adown into the water cold.

There with one arm the hero did she hold,
And with the other thrust the whirling trees
Away from them ; and laughing, and with ease
Went through the yellow foaming stream, and came
Unto the other bank ; and little shame
Had Jason that a woman carried him,
For no man, howsoever strong of limb,
Had dared across that swollen stream to go,
But if he wished the Stygian stream to know ;
Therefore he doubted not, that with some God
Or reverend Goddess that rough way he trod.

So when she had clomb up the slippery bank
And let him go, well-nigh adown he sank,
For he was dizzy with the washing stream,
And with that passage mazed as with a dream.

But, turning round about unto the crone,
He saw not her, but a most glorious one,
A lady clad in blue, all glistening
With something more than gold, crowned like the king
Of all the world, and holding in her hand
A jewelled rod. So when he saw her stand
With unsoiled feet scarce touching the wet way,
He trembled sore, but therewith heard her say :—

" O Jason, such as I have been to thee
Upon this day, such ever will I be ;
And I am Juno ; therefore doubt thou not
A mighty helper henceforth thou hast got
Against the swords and bitter tongues of men,
For surely mayst thou lean upon me, when
The turbulent and little-reasoning throng
Press hard upon thee, or a king with wrong
Would fain undo thee, as thou leanedst now
Within the yellow stream : so from no blow
Hold back thine hand, nor fear to set thine heart
On what thou deemest fits thy kingly part.

" Now to the king's throne this day draw anear,
Because of old time I have set a fear
Within his heart, ere yet thou hadst gained speech,
And whilst thou wanderedst beneath oak and beech
Unthinking. And, behold ! so have I wrought,
That with thy coming shall a sign be brought
Unto him ; for the latchet of thy shoe
Rushing Anaurus late I bade undo,
Which now is carried swiftly to the sea.

" So Pelias, this day setting eyes on thee,
Shall not forget the shameful trickling blood
Adown my altar-steps, or in my wood
The screaming peacocks scared by other screams,
Nor yet to-night shall he dream happy dreams.

" Farewell, then, and be joyful, for I go
Unto the people, many a thing to show,
And set them longing for forgotten things,
Whose rash hands toss about the crowns of kings."

Therewith before his eyes a cloud there came,
Sweet-smelling, coloured like a rosy flame,
That wrapt the Goddess from him ; who, indeed,
Went to Iolchos, and there sowed the seed
Of bitter change, that ruins kings of men ;
For, like an elder of threescore and ten,
Throughout the town she went, and, as such do,
Ever she blessed the old, and banned the new ;

Lamenting for the passed and happy reign
Of Cretheus, wishing there were come again
One like to him ; till in the market-place
About the king was many a doubtful face.

Now Jason, by Anaurus left alone,
Found that, indeed, his right-foot shoe was gone,
But, as the Goddess bade him, went his way
Half shod, and by an hour before mid-day
He reached the city gates, and entered there,
Whom the folk mocked, beholding his foot bare,
And iron-hilted sword, and uncouth weed :
But of no man did he take any heed,
But came into the market-place, where thronged
Much folk about him who his sire had wronged.
But when he stood within that busy stead,
Taller he showed than any by a head,
Great limbed, broad shouldered, mightier than all,
But soft of speech, though unto him did fall
Full many a scorn upon that day to get.

So in a while he came where there was set
Pelias, the king, judging the people there ;
In scarlet was he clad, and on his hair,
Sprinkled with grey, he wore a royal crown,
And from an ivory throne he looked adown
Upon the suitors and the restless folk.

Now, when the yellow head of Jason broke
From out the throng, with fearless eyes and grey,
A terror took the king, that ere that day
For many a peaceful year he had not felt,
And his hand fell upon his swordless belt ;
But when the hero strode up to the throne,
And set his unshod foot upon the stone
Of the last step thereof, and as he stood,
Drew off the last fold of his russet hood,
And with a clang let fall his brass-bound spear,
The king shrunk back, grown pale with deadly fear ;
Nor then the oak-trees' speech did he forget,
Noting the one bare foot, and garments wet,

And something half remembered in his face.

And now nigh silent was the crowded place,
For through the folk remembrance Juno sent,
And soon from man to man a murmur went,
And frowning folk were whispering deeds of shame
And wrong the king had wrought, and Æson's name,
Forgotten long, was bandied all about,
And silent mouths seemed ready for a shout.

So, when the king raised up a hand, that shook
With fear, and turned a wrathful, timorous look
On his Ætolian guards, upon his ears
There fell the clashing of the people's spears ;
And on the house-tops round about the square
Could he behold folk gathered here and there,
And see the sunbeams strike on brass and steel.
But therewithal, though new fear did he feel,
He thought, " Small use of arms in this distress,--
Needs is it that I use my willness ; "
Then spoke aloud : " O, man, what wouldst thou here
That bearest thus a king with little fear ? "

" Pelias," he said, " I will not call thee king,
Because thy crown is but a stolen thing,
And with a stolen sceptre dost thou reign,
Which now I bid thee render up again,
And on his father's throne my father set,
Whom for long years the Gods did well forget,
But now, in lapse of time, remembering,
Have raised me, Jason, up to do this thing,
His son, and son of fair Alcimidé ;
Yet now, since Tyro's blood 'twixt thee and me
Still runs, and thou my father's brother art,
In no wise would I hurt thee, for my part,
If thou wilt render to us but our own,
And still shalt thou stand nigh my father's throne."

Then all the people, when aright they knew,
That this was Æson's son, about them drew,
And when he ended gave a mighty shout ;
But Pelias cleared his face of fear and doubt,

And answered Jason, smiling cunningly :—

“ Yea, in good time thou comest unto me,
My nephew Jason ; fain would I lay down
This heavy weight and burden of a crown,
And have instead my brother’s love again,
I lost, to win a troublous thing and vain ;
And yet, since now thou showest me such goodwill,
Fain would I be king a short while still,
That everything in order I may set,
Nor any man thereby may trouble get.
And now I bid thee stand by me to-day,
And cast all fear and troublous thoughts away ;
And for thy father Æson will I send,
That I may see him as a much-loved friend,
Now that these years of bitterness are passed,
And peaceful days are come to me at last.”

With that, from out the press grave Æson came,
E’en as he spoke ; for to his ears the fame
Of Jason’s coming thither had been brought ;
Wherefore, with eager eyes his son he sought ;
But, seeing the mighty hero great of limb,
Stopped short, with eyes set wistfully on him,
While a false honied speech the king began :

“ Hail, brother Æson, hail, O happy man !
To-day thou winnest back a noble son,
Whose glorious deeds this hour sees begun,
And from my hands thou winnest back the crown
Of this revered and many-peopled town ;
So let me win from thee again thy love,
Nor with long anger slight the Gods above.”

Then Jason, holding forth the horn and ring,
Said to his father : “ Doubtest thou this thing ?
Behold the tokens Cheiron gave to me
When first he said that I was sprung from thee.”

Then little of those signs did Æson reck,
But cast his arms about the hero’s neck,
And kissed him oft, remembering well the time
When as he sat beneath the flowering lime

Beside his house, the glad folk to him came
And said : " O King, all honour to thy name
That will not perish surely, for thy son
His royal life this day has just begun."

Wherefore unto him, like an empty dream,
The busy place, the king and folk did seem,
As on that sight at last he set his eyes,
Prayed for so oft with many a sacrifice ;
And speechless for a while fain must he stand,
Holding within his hand the mighty hand ;
And as the wished-for son he thus beheld,
Half mournful thoughts of swiftly-gathering eld
Came thick upon him, till the salt tears ran
On to the raiment of the goodly man ;
Until at last he said : " All honour now
To Jove and all the Gods ! Surely, I know,
Henceforth my name shall never perish ; yet
But little joy of this man shall I get,
For through the wide world where will be the king
Who will not fear him ; nor shall anything
Be strong against him ; therefore certainly
Full seldom will he ride afield with me,
Nor will he long bear at his father's board
To sit, well-known of all, but with his sword
Will rather burst asunder banded throngs
Of evil men, and heal some great king's wrongs.

" And as for thee, O Pelias, as I may,
Will I be friend to thee from this same day ;
And since we both of us are growing old,
And both our lives will soon be as tales told,
I think perchance that thou wilt let me be,
To pass these few years in felicity
That this one brings me."

Thereon Pelias said :—

" Yea, if I hurt thee ought, then on my head
Be every curse that thou canst ever think ;
And dying, of an ill draught may I drink,
For in my mind is nought but wish for rest.

“ But on this day, I pray thee, be my guest,
While yet upon my head I wear the crown,
Which, ere this morning’s flowers have fallen down,
Your head shall bear again ; for in the hall,
Upon the floor the fresh-plucked rushes fall,
Even as we speak, and maids and men bear up
The kingly service ; many a jewelled cup
And silver platter ; and the fires roar
About the stalled ox and the woodland boar ;
And wine we have, that ere this youngling’s eyes
First saw the light, made tears and laughter rise
Up from men’s hearts, making the past seem dull,
The future hollow, but the present full
Of all delights, if quick they pass away ;
And we, who have been foes for many a day,
Surely, ere evening sees the pitcher dry,
May yet be friends, and talking lovingly,
And with our laughter make the pillars ring,
While this one sits revolving many a thing,
Saddened by that, which makes us elders glad.”

Such good words said he, but the thoughts were bad
Within his crafty breast ; and still he thought
How best he might be rid of him just brought,
By sentence of the Gods, upon his head.

Then moved the kinsmen from the market-stead
Between a lane of men, who ever pressed
About the princes, and with loud words blessed
The hero and his race, and thought no shame
To kiss his skirts ; and so at last they came
Unto the house that rustling limes did shade,
And thereabout was many a slender maid,
Who welcomed them with music and sweet song,
And cast red roses as they went along
Before their feet ; and therewith brought the three
Into the palace, where right royally
Was Jason clad, and seemed a prince indeed.

So while the harp-string and shrill-piping reed
Still sounded, trooped the folk unto the feast,

And all were set to meat, both most and least ;
And when with dainties they were fully fed,
Then the tall jars and well-sewn goat-skins bled,
And men grew glad, forgetting every care.
But first a golden chain and mantle fair
Pelias did on him ; and then, standing up,
Poured out red wine from a great golden cup,
Unto the Gods, and prayed to them : " O ye
Who rule the world, grant us felicity
This hour, at least, nor let our sweet delight
Be marred by ought, until the silent night
Has come, and turned to day again, and we
Wake up once more to joy or misery,
Or death itself, if so it pleaseth you :
Is this thing, then, so great a thing to do ? "

Thereon folk shouted, and the pipes again
Breathed through the hall a sweet heart-softening strain,
And up the hall came lovely damsels, dressed
In gowns of green, who unto every guest
Gave a rose garland, nor yet hasted they,
When this was done, to pass too quick away,
If here and there an eager hand still held
By gown or wrist, whom the young prince beheld
With longing eyes that roved about the hall.
Now longer did the cool grey shadows fall,
And faster drew the sun unto the west,
And in the field the husbandman, opprest
With twelve hours' labour, turned unto his home,
And to the fold the woolly sheep were come ;
And in the hall the folk began to tell
Stories of men of old, who bore them well,
And piteous tales. And Jason in mean while
Sat listening as his uncle, with a smile,
Kept pouring many a thing into his ears,
Now worthy laughter, and now meet for tears.
Until at last, when twilight was nigh gone,
And dimly through the place the gold outshone,
He bade them bring in torches, and while folk

Blinked on the glare that through the pillars broke,
He said to Jason : " Yet have I to tell
One tale I would that these should hear as well
As you, O Prince," And therewith did he call
The herald, bidding him throughout the hall
Cry silence, for the story of the king.

And this being done, and all men listening,
He rose and said, " O noble Minyæ,
Right prosperous and honoured may ye be ;
When Athamas ruled over Thebes the great,
Upon his house there fell a heavy fate,
Making his name a mere byword ; for he,
Being wedded to the noble Nephele,
Gat on her a fair youth and tender maid,
Phryxus and Helle ; but, being nought afraid
Of what the righteous Gods might do to him,
And seeing Ino, fair of face and limb
Beyond all other, needs with her must wed,
And to that end drove from his royal bed
Unhappy Nephele, who now must be
A slave, where once she governed royally ;
While the white-footed Ino sat alone
By Athamas upon the ivory throne.

" And now, as time went on, did Ino bear
To Athamas two children hale and fair ;
Therefore, the more increased her enmity
Against those two erst born of Nephele,
Who yet, in spite of all things, day by day
Grew fairer as their sad lives wore away ;
Till Ino thought, ' What help will it have been,
That through these years I have been called a queen,
And set gold raiment on my children dear,
If Athamas should die and leave me here
Betwixt the people and this Nephele,
With those she bore ? What then could hap to me
But death or shame ? for then, no doubt, would reign
Over this mighty town the children twain ;

With her who once was queen still standing near,
And whispering fell words in her darlings' ear.
And then what profit would it be that they
Have won through me full many an evil day ;
That Phryxus base and servile deeds doth know,
Unmeet for lords ; that many a shame and woe,
Helle has borne, and yet is wont to stand,
Shrinking with fear, before some dreaded hand ;
If still the ending of it must be this,
That I must die while they live on in bliss,
And cherish her that first lay in my bed ?
Nor is there any help till they be dead.'

" Then did she fall on many an evil thought,
And going thence, with threats and money brought
The women of the land to do this thing :
In the mid-winter, yea, before the spring
Was in men's minds, they took the good seed corn,
And while their husbands toiled in the dark morn,
And dreaded nought, they thoroughly seethed it all ;
Whereby this seeming portent did befall,
That neither the sweet showers of April tide,
Nor the May sunshine, gleaming far and wide
Over the meadows, made their furrows green,-
Nor yet in June was any young shoot seen.

" Then drew the country folk unto the king,
Weeping and wailing, telling of the thing,
And praying him to satisfy the God,
Whoe'er he was, who with this cruel rod
So smote his wretched people : whereon he
Bade all his priests inquire solemnly
What thing had moved the Gods to slay them thus ?
Who, hearing all this story piteous,
Because their hands had felt Queen Ino's gold,
And itched for more, this thing in answer told :—

" That great Diana with Queen Nephele
Was wroth beyond all measure, for that she,
Being vowed unto the Goddess, none the less
Cast by the quiver and the girt-up dress,

To wed with Athamas, the mighty king,
Therefore must she pay forfeit for the thing,
And though she still should keep her wretched life,
Yet must she give her children to the knife,
Or else this dearth should be but happiness
To what should come, for she would so oppress
The land of Thebes, that folk who saw its name
In old records, would turn the page, and blame
The chronicler for telling empty lies,
And mingling fables with his histories.

"Therefore is Athamas a wretched man
To hear this tale, and doeth what he can
To save his flesh and blood, but all in vain ;
Because the people, cruel in their pain,
With angry words were thronging the great hall,
And crafty Ino at his feet did fall,
Saying, ' Oh, King, I pray for these, and me,
And for my children.' Therefore, mournfully
He called the priests again, and bade them say,
In few words, how his children they would slay,
And when the dreadful bearer of the bow
Would best be pleased to see their young blood flow.
Who said, ' that if the thing were quickly done,
Seeing the green things were not wholly gone,
The ruined fields might give a little food,
And that high noon-tide the next day was good,
Above all other hours, to do the thing ;'
And thereupon they prayed unto the king,
To take the younglings, lest, being fled away,
They still might live and leave an evil day
To Thebes and all its folk henceforth to bear.

"Then men were sent, who by the river fair
Found Phryxus casting nets into the stream,
Who, seeing them coming, little harm did deem
They meant him, and with welcome bade them share
The glittering heap of fishes that lay there.
But they with laughter fell at once on him,
Who, struggling wrathfully, broke here a limb

And there a head, but lastly on the ground
Being felled by many men, was straightly bound,
And in an iron-bolted prison laid,
While to the house they turned to seek the maid.

“ Whom soon they found, within the weaving-room,
Bent earnestly above the rattling loom,
Working not like a king's child, but a slave
Who strives her body from the scourge to save.
On her they seized, speechless for very fear,
And dragged her trembling to the prison drear,
Where lay her brother, and there cast her in,
Giddy and fainting, wondering for what sin
She suffered this ; but, finding Phryxus laid
In the same dismal place, the wretched maid
Bewailed with him the sorrows of their life,
Praying the Gods to show the king's new wife
What sorrow was, nor let her hair grow grey
Ere in some hopeless place her body lay.

“ Now in that court a certain beast there was,
The gift of Neptune to King Athamas,
A mighty ram, greater than such beasts be
In any land about the Grecian sea ;
And in all else a wonder to men's eyes,
For from his shoulders did two wings arise,
That seemed as they were wrought of beaten gold,
And all his fleece was such as in no fold
The shepherd sees, for all was gold indeed,
And now this beast with dainty grass to feed,
The task of Nephele had late been made,
Who, nothing of the mighty ram afraid,
Would bring him flowering trefoil day by day,
And comb his fleece ; and her the ram would pay
With gentle bleatings, and would lick her hand,
As in his well-built palace he did stand.
For all the place was made of polished wood,
Studded with gold ; and, when he thought it good,
Within a little meadow could he go,
Throughout the midst whereof a stream did flow,

And at the corners were there great lime-trees,
Hummed over by innumerable bees.

"So on the morning when these twain should die,
Stole Nephele to this place quietly
And loosed the ram, and led him straight away
Unto Diana's temple, where that day
Her heart should break unless the Gods were good.
There with the ram, close in a little wood,
She hid herself a-nigh the gates, till noon
Should bring those to the Lady of the Moon
She longed to see ; and as the time drew nigh,
She knelt, and with her trembling hands did tie
About the gold beast's neck a mystic thing,
And in his ears, meanwhile, was murmuring
Words taught her by the ever-changing God,
Who on the sands at noon is wont to nod
Beside the flock of Neptune ; till at last
Upon the breeze the sound of flutes went past ;
Then sore she trembled, as she held the beast
By the two golden horns, but never ceased
Her mystic rhyme ; and louder, and more loud
The music sounded, till the solemn crowd
Along the dusty road came full in sight.
First went the minstrels, clad in raiment white,
Both men and maids garlanded daintily ;
And then ten damsels, naked from the knee,
Who in their hands bare bows done round with leaves,
And arrows at their backs in goodly sheaves,
Gaudily feathered, ready for the strife ;
Then came three priests, whereof one bore the knife,
One a great golden bowl to hold the blood,
And one a bundle of some sacred wood ;
And then was left a little vacant space,
And then came gold, and she could see the face
Of beauteous Ino, flushed and triumphing,
And by her, moody and downcast, the king.
"And now her heart beat quick and fast indeed,
Because the two came, doomed that day to bleed,

Of whom went Phryxus in most manly mood,
Looking around, with mournful, steady eyes,
Upon the green fields and the braveries,
And all he never thought to see again.
But Helle, as she went, could not refrain
From bitter wailing for the days gone by,
When hope was mixed with certain misery ;
And, when the long day's task and fear was done,
She might take pleasure sometimes in the sun,
Whose rays she saw now glittering on the knife
That in a little time would end her life.

" Now she, who in coarse raiment had been clad
For many a year, upon her body had,
On this ill day, a golden pearl-wrought gown,
And on her drooping head a glittering crown,
And jewelled sandals on her fainting feet,
And on her neck and bosom jewels meet
For one who should be wedded to a king ;
Thus to her death went moaning this sweet thing.

" But when they drew a-nigh the temple gate
The trembling, weeping mother, laid in wait,
Let go the mighty beast upon the throng,—
Like as a hunter holds the gazehound long,
Until the great buck stalks from out the herd,
And then, with well-remembered hunting word,
Slips the stout leash,—so did she slip the beast,
Who dashed aside both singing-man and priest,
And girded maiden, and the startled king,
And Ino, grown all pale to see the thing,
With rising horror in her evil heart.
And thereon Phryxus, seeing the crowd part,
And this deliverer nigh him, with wings spread
Ready for flight, and eager threatening head,
Without more words, upon his broad back sprung,
And drew his sister after him, who clung
With trembling arms about him ; and straightway
They turned unto the rising of the day,
And over all rose up into the air

With sounding wings ; nor yet did any dare,
As fast they flew, to bend on them a bow,
Thinking some God had surely willed it so.

“ Then went the king unto his house again,
And Ino with him, downcast that the twain
Had so escaped her, waiting for what fate
Should bring upon her doomed head, soon or late.

“ Nor long she waited ; for, one evil day,
Unto the king her glittering gold array
And rosy flesh, half seen through raiment thin,
Seemed like the many-spotted leopard's skin ;
And her fair hands and feet like armed paws
The treacherous beast across the strained throat draws
Of some poor fawn ; and when he saw her go
Across the hall, her footsteps soft and slow
And the lithe motion of her body fair
But made him think of some beast from his lair
Stolen forth at the beginning of the night.

“ Therefore with fear and anger at the sight
He shook, being maddened by some dreadful God ;
And stealthily about the place he trod,
Seeking his sword ; and, getting it to hand,
With flaming eyes and foaming mouth did stand
Awhile, then rushed at Ino as she stood
Trembling, with cheeks all drained of rosy blood ;
Who straightway caught her raiment up, and fled
Adown the streets, where once she had been led
In triumph by the man whose well-known cheer
Close at her heels, now struck such deadly fear
Into her heart, the forge of many a woe.

“ So, full of anguish, panting did she go
O'er rough and smooth, till field and wood was passed,
And on the border of the sea at last,
With raiment torn and unshod feet, she stood,
Reddening the flowering sea-pink with her blood.

“ But when she saw the tireless hunter nigh,
All wild and shouting, with a dreadful cry

She stretched her arms out seaward, and sprung down
Over the cliff among the seaweed brown
And washing surf, neither did any one
See ought of her again beneath the sun.

“ But Athamas, being come to where she stood,
Stared vacantly awhile upon the blood,
Then, looking seaward, drew across his eyes
His fevered hand ; and thronging memories
Came thick upon him, until dreamily
He turned his back upon the hungry sea,
And cast his sword down ; and so, weaponless,
Went back, half-waking to his sore distress.

“ As for the twain,—perched on that dizzy height,
The white-walled city faded from their sight,
And many another place that well they knew ;
And over woods and meadows still they flew ;
And to the husbandmen seemed like a flame
Blown 'twixt the earth and the sky ; until they came
Unto the borders of the murmuring sea.
Nor stayed they yet, but flew unceasingly,
Till, looking back, seemed Pelion like a cloud ;
And they beheld the white-topped billows crowd
Unto the eastward, 'neath the following wind.

“ And there a wretched end did Helle find
Unto her life ; for when she did behold,
So far beneath, the deep green sea and cold,
She shut her eyes for horror of the sight,
Turning the sunny day to murk midnight,
Through which there floated many an awful thing,
Made vocal by the ceaseless murmuring
Beneath her feet ; till a great gust of wind
Caught the beast's wings and swayed him round ; then,
blind,

Dizzy, and fainting, grew her limbs too weak
To hold their place, though still her hands did seek
Some stay by catching at the locks of gold ;
And as she fell her brother strove to hold

Her jewelled girdle, but the treacherous zone
Broke in his hand, and he was left alone
Upon the ram, that, as a senseless thing,
Still flew on toward the east, no whit heeding
His shouts and cries ; but Helle, as she fell
Down through the depths, the sea-folk guarded well,
And kept her body dead, from scar or wound,
And laid it, in her golden robes enwound,
Upon the south side of the murmuring strait,
That still, in memory of her piteous fate,
Bears her sweet name ; her, in a little while,
The country folk beheld, and raised a pile
Of beech and oak, with scented things around,
And, lifting up the poor corpse from the ground,
Laid it thereon, and there did everything,
As for the daughter of a mighty king.

“ But through the straits passed Phryxus, sad enow,
And fearful of the wind that by his brow
Went shrieking, as, without all stop or stay,
The golden wings still bore him on his way
Above the unlucky waves of that ill sea
That foamed beneath his feet unceasingly.
Nor knew he to what land he was being borne,
Whether he should be set, unarmed, forlorn,
In darksome lands, among unheard-of things,
Or, stepping off from 'twixt the golden wings,
Should set foot in some happy summer isle,
Whereon the kind unburning sun doth smile
For ever, and that knows no frost or drought ;
Or else, it seemed to him, he might be brought
Unto green forests where the wood-nymphs play
With their wild mates, and fear no coming day.
And there might he forget both crown and sword,
And e'en the names of slave, and king, and lord,
And lead a merry life, till all was done,
And 'mid the green boughs, marked by no carved stone,
His unremembered bones should waste away,

In dew, and rain, and sunshine, day by day.

“ So, 'mid these thoughts, still clinging fearfully
Unto his dizzy seat, he passed the sea,
And reached a river opening into it,
Across the which the white-winged fowl did flit
From cliff to cliff, and on the sandy bar
The fresh waves and the salt waves were at war,
At turning of the tide. Forth flew they then,
Till they drew nigh a strange abode of men,
Far up the river, white-walled, fair, and great,
And at each end of it a brazen gate,
Wide open through the daylight, guarded well,
And nothing of its name could Phryxus tell,
But hoped the beast would stop, for to his eyes
The place seemed fair ; nor fell it otherwise.
There stayed the ram his course, and lighted down
Hard by the western gate of that fair town,
And on the hard way Phryxus joyfully
Set foot, full dizzy with the murmuring sea,
Numbed by the cold wind ; and, with little fear,
Unto the guarded gate he drew anear,
While the gold beast went ever after him.

“ But they, beholding him so strong of limb,
And fair of face, and seeing the beast that trod
Behind his back, deemed him some wandering God,
So let the two-edged sword hang by the side,
And by the wall the well-steeled spears abide.

“ But he called out to them, ‘ What place is this ?
And who rules over you for woe or bliss ?
And will he grant me peace to-day or war ?
And may I here abide, or still afar
Must I to new abodes go wandering ? ’

“ Now as he spake those words, that city's king
Adown the street was drawing towards the gate,
Clad in gold raiment worthy his estate,
Therefore one said : ‘ Behold, our king is here,
Who of all us is held both lief and dear ;
Æetes, leader of a mighty host,

Feared by all folk along the windy coast.
And since this city's name thou fain wouldst know,
Men call it Æea, built long years ago,
Holpen of many Gods, who love it well.
Now come thou to the king, and straightly tell
Thy name and country, if thou art a man,
And how thou camest o'er the water wan,
And what the marvel is thou hast with thee ;
But if thou art a God, then here will we
Build thee a house, and, reverencing thy name,
Bring thee great gifts and much-desired fame.'
" Thus spake he, fearful ; but by this the king
Had reached the place, and stood there wondering
At that strange beast and fair man richly clad,
Who at his belt no sort of weapon had ;
Then spake he : ' Who art thou, in what strange wain
Hast thou crossed o'er the green and restless plain
Unharvested of any ? And this thing,
That like an image stands with folded wing,
Is he a gift to thee from any God,
Or hast thou in some unknown country trod,
Where beasts are such-like ? Howsoe'er it be,
Here shalt thou dwell, if so thou wilt, with me,
Unless some God is chasing thee, and then,
What wouldst thou have us do, who are but men,
Against the might of Gods ? '


Then answered he :
' O king, I think no God is wrath with me,
But rather some one loves me ; for, behold,
A while ago, just as my foe did hold
The knife against my throat, there came this ram,
Who brought me to the place where now I am
Safe from the sea and from the bitter knife.
And in this city would I spend my life,
And do what service seemeth good to thee,
Since all the Gods it pleases I should be
Outcast from friends and country, though alive ;
Nor with their will have I the heart to strive

More than thou hast ; and now as in such wise
I have been saved, fain would I sacrifice
This beast to Jove, the helper of all such,
As false friends fail, or foes oppress too much.'

" ' Yea,' said Æetes, ' so the thing shall be
In whatsoever fashion pleaseth thee ;
And long time mayst thou dwell with us in bliss,
Not doing any service worse than this,
To bear in war my royal banner forth,
When fall the wild folk on us from the north.
Come now this eve, and hold high feast with us,
And tell us all of strange and piteous
Thy story hath.'

So went he with the king,
And gladly told unto him everything
That had befallen him, and in a grove,
Upon the altar of the Saving Jove,
They offered up the ram the morrow morn
That thitherward the Theban prince had borne.

" And thenceforth Phryxus dwelt in Colchis long
In wealth and honour, and, being brave and strong,
Won great renown in many a bloody fray,
And still grew greater ; and both night and day,
Within his pillared house, upon the wall
Hung the gold fell ; until it did befall
That in Æetes' heart a longing grew
To have the thing, yea, even if he slew
His guest to get it ; so, one evil night,
While the prince lay and dreamed about the fight,
With all armed men was every entry filled,
And quickly were the few doorkeepers killed ;
And Phryxus, roused with clamour from his bed,
Half-armed and dizzy, with few strokes was dead.
And thus the King Æetes had his will,
And thus the GOLDEN FLEECE he keepeth still
Somewhere within his royal house of gold.

" And thus, O s the story told

Of things that happened forty years ago ;
Nor of the Greeks has there been any one
To set the Theban's bones within a tomb,
Or to Æetes mete out his due doom ;
And yet, indeed, it seemeth unto me
That many a man would go right willingly,
And win great thanks of men and godlike fame,
If there should spring up some great prince of name
To lead them ; and I pray that such an one,
Before my head is laid beneath a stone,
Be sent unto us by the Gods above."

Therewith he ceased ; but all the hall did move
As moves a grove of rustling poplar trees
Bowed all together by the shifting breeze,
And through the place the name of Jason ran,
Nor, 'mid the feasters, was there any man
But toward the hero's gold-seat turned his eyes.
Meanwhile, in Jason's heart did thoughts arise
That brought the treacherous blood into his cheek,
And he forgot his father, old and weak,
Left 'twixt the fickle people of the land
And wily Pelias, while he clenched his hand,
As though it held a sword, about his cup.
Then, 'mid the murmuring, Pelias stood up
And said : " O, leaders of the Minyæ,
I hear ye name a name right dear to me—
My brother's son, who in the oaken wood
Has grown up nurtured of the Centaur good,
And now this day has come again to us,
Fair faced and mighty limbed, and amorous
Of fame and glorious deeds ; nowise content
Betwixt the forest and the northern bent
To follow up the antlers of the deer,
Nor in his eyes can I see any fear
Of fire, or water, or the cleaving sword.

" Now, therefore, if ye take him for your lord
Across the sea, most surely ye will get

Both fame and wealth, nor will men soon forget
To praise the noble city whence ye came,
Passing from age to age each hero's name."

Then all stood up and shouted, and the king,
While yet the hall with Jason's name did ring,
Set in his hands a gleaming cup of gold,
And said : " O Jason, wilt thou well behold
These leaders of the people, who are fain
To go with thee and suffer many a pain
And deadly fear, if they may win at last
Undying fame when fleeting life is past ?
And now, if thou art willing to be first
Of all these men, of whom, indeed, the worst
Is like a God, pour out this gleaming wine
To him with whose light all the heavens shine,
Almighty Jove."

Then Jason poured, and said :
" O Jove, by thy hand may all these be led
To name and wealth ! and yet, indeed, for me,
What happy ending shall I ask from thee ?
What helpful friends ? what length of quiet years ?
What freedom from ill care and deadly fears ?
Do what thou wilt, but none the less believe
That all these things and more thou shouldst receive,
If thou wert Jason, I were Jove to-day.

" And ye who now are hot to play this play,
Seeking the fleece across an unknown sea,
Bethink ye yet of death, and misery,
And dull despair, before ye arm to go
Unto a savage king and folk none know,
Whence it may well hap none of ye to come
Again unto your little ones and home.

" And do thou, Pelias, ere we get us forth,
Send heralds out, east, west, and south, and north,
And with them cunning men, of golden speech,
Thy tale unto the Grecian folk to teach ;
That we may lack for neither strength nor wit,
For many a brave man like a fool will sit

Beside the council board ; and men there are
Wise-hearted who know little feats of war ;
Nor would I be without the strength of spears,
Or waste wise words on dull and foolish ears.

“ Also we need a cunning artisan,
Taught by the Gods, and knowing more than man,
To build us a good ship upon this shore.
Then, if but ten lay hold upon the oar,
And I, the eleventh, steer them toward the east,
To seek the hidden fleece of that gold beast,
I swear to Jove that only in my hand
The fleece shall be, when I again take land
To see my father’s hall, or the green grass
O’er which the grey Thessalian horses pass.

“ But now, O friends, forget all till the morn
With other thoughts and fears is duly born ! ”

He ceased, and all men shouted ; and again
They filled their cups, and many a draught did drain.
But Pelias gazed with heedful eyes at him,
Nor drank the wine that well-nigh touched the brim
Of his gold cup ; and, noting every word,
Thought well that he should be a mighty lord,
For now already like a king he spoke,
Gazing upon the wild tumultuous folk
As one who knows what troubles are to come,
And in this world looks for no peaceful home,—
So much he dreaded what the Gods might do.

But Æson, when he first heard Pelias, knew
What wile was stirring, and he sat afeard,
With sinking heart, as all the tale he heard ;
But after, hearkening what his son did say,
He deemed a God spoke through him on that day,
And held his peace ; yet to himself he said :
“ And if he wins all, still shall I be dead
Ere on the shore he stands beside the fleece,
The greatest and most honoured man in Greece.”

But Jason, much rejoicing in his life,

Drank and was merry, longing for the strife ;
Though in his heart he did not fail to see
His uncle's cunning wiles and treachery ;
But thought, when sixty years are gone, at most,
Then will all pleasure and all pain be lost ;
Although my name, indeed, be cast about
From hall to temple, amid song and shout :
So let me now be merry with the best.

Meanwhile, all men spoke hotly of the quest,
And healths they drank to many an honoured man,
Until the moon sank, and the stars waxed wan,
And from the east faint yellow light outshone
O'er the Greek sea, so many years ago.

BOOK III

Now the next morn, when risen was the sun,
Men 'gan to busk them for the quest begun :
Nor long delay made Pelias, being in fear
Lest ought should stay them ; so his folk did bear
News of these things throughout the towns of Greece,
Moving great men to seek the golden fleece.

Therefore, from many a lordship forth they rode,
Leaving both wife and child and loved abode,
And many a town must now be masterless,
And women's voices rule both more and less,
And women's hands be dreaded, far and wide,
This fair beginning of the summer-tide.

Now, all the folk who went upon this quest
I cannot name, but fain would hope the best
In men's remembrance ancient tales did keep
Unto our time, letting the others sleep
In nameless graves—though, mayhap, one by one,
These grew to be forgotten 'neath the sun,
Being neither poor of heart, or weak of wit,

More than those others whose crowned memories sit
Enthroned amid the echoing minstrelsy
Sung of old time beside the Grecian sea.

Howe'er it be, now clinging to the hem
Of those old singers, will I tell of them,
In weak and faltering voice, e'en as I can.

Now was the well-skilled Argus the first man
Who through the gates into Iolchos passed,
Whose lot in fertile Egypt first was cast,
The nurse of Gods and wonder-working men ;
His father's name was Danaus, who till then
Had held the golden rod above the Nile,
Feared by all men for force and deadly wile.

So he, being brought to Jason, said : " O King,
Me have the Gods sent here to do the thing
Ye need the most ; for truly have I seen,
'Twixt sleep and waking, one clad like a queen,
About whose head strange light shone gloriously,
Stand at my bed's foot, and she said to me :
' Argus, arise, when dawn is on the earth,
And go unto a city great of girth
Men call Iolchos, and there ask for one
Who now gets ready a great race to run
Upon a steed whose maker thou shalt be,
And whose course is the bitter trackless sea,—
Jason, the king's son, now himself a king ;—
And bid him hearken, by this tokening,
That I, who send thee to him, am the same
Who in the greenwood bade him look for fame
That he desired little ; and am she
Who, when the eddies rushed tumultuously
About us, bore him to the river side :—
And unto thee shall such-like things betide.'

" Therewith she told me many a crafty thing
About this keel that ye are now lacking,
Bidding me take thee for my king and lord,
And thee to heed my counsel as her word

As for this thing. So if ye would set forth
Before the winter takes us from the north,
I pray you let there be at my commands
Such men as are most skilful of their hands,
Nor spare to take lintel, roof-tree, or post
Of ash or pine, or oak that helpeth most,
From whoso in this city lacketh gold ;
And chiefly take the post that now doth hold
The second rafter in the royal hall,
That I may make the good ship's prow withal,
For soothly from Dodona doth it come,
Though men forget it, the grey pigeons' home.
" So look to see a marvel, and forthright
Set on the smiths the sounding brass to smite,
For surely shall all ye your armour need
Before these flower-buds have turned to seed."

Then Jason gave him thanks and gifts enow,
And through the town sought all who chanced to know
The woodwright's craft, by whom was much begun,
Whilst he took gifts of wood from many an one,
And getting timber with great gifts of gold,
Spared not to take the great post used to hold
The second rafter in the royal hall
To make the new ship's goodly prow withal.

So Argus laboured, and the work was sped,
Moreover, by a man with hoary head,
Whose dwelling and whose name no man could know,
Who many a strange thing of the craft did show,
And 'mid their work men gazed at him askance,
Half fearful of his reverend piercing glance,
But did his bidding ; yet knew not, indeed,
It was the Queen of Heaven, Saturn's seed.

Meanwhile came many heroes to the town :—
Asterion, dweller on the windy down
Below Philæus, far up in the north ;
Slow-footed Polyphemus, late borne forth
In chariot from Larissa, that beholds

Green-winding Peneus cleaving fertile wolds ;
Erginus, son of Neptune, nigh the sea
His father set him, where the laden bee
Flies low across Mæander, and falls down
Against the white walls of a merchant town
Men call Miletus.

Behind him there came
The winner of a great and dreaded name,
Theseus, the slayer of the fearful beast,
Who soon in winding halls should make his feast
On youths and maidens ; and with him there rode
The king Pirithous, who his loved abode
Amid the shady trees had left that tide
Where fly the centaurs' arrows far and wide.

Black-haired was Theseus, slim, and still his cheek
Lacked all but down, for yet he had to seek
The twisted ways of Dædalus the old ;
But long and twining locks of ruddy gold
Blew round the face of the huge forest king,
As carelessly he rode and feared no thing.

Great joy had Jason, gazing on the twain,
Young though they were, and thought that not in vain
His quest should be, if such as these had will
The hollow of his great black ship to fill.

Next, threading Argive ways and woody lanes,
Came Nauplius, son of Neptune, to those plains,
Crossing Anaurus dryshod, for his sire
With threats and blows drove up the land-stream higher,
And sucked the sea-waves back across the sands ;
With him came Idmon, mighty of his hands,
But mightier that he was skilled to know
The council of the God who bears the bow,
His very father, who bore not to see
Unloved, Cyrene wandering carelessly
Beside the Peneus ; Iolaus came
From Argos, too, to win a deathless name ;
And if thenceforth came any heroes more
I know not, and their names have died of yore.

But from Arcadian forests came forth one
Who like a goddess 'mid the rowers shone,
Swift-running Atalanta, golden-haired,
Grey-eyed, and simple ; with her white limbs bared,
And sandalled feet set firm upon the sand,
Amid the wondering heroes did she stand
A very maid, yet fearing not for ought ;
For she, with many a vow, had dearly bought
Diana's love, and in no flowery stead
Had borne to hear love-songs, or laid her head
On any trembling lover's heaving breast ;
Therefore of mortals was she loved the best
By Her, who through the forest goes a-nights,
And, in return for never-tried delights,
Has won a name no woman else can have.

Next through the gates his car Oileus drave,
The Locrian king, red-haired, with fierce grey eyes
Wandering from right to left, as though some prize
He sought for in the rich Thessalian land ;
Then Iphiclus beside the gates did stand,
His kine at all adventure left at home,
That on a doubtful voyage he might roam.

Admetus from the well-walled Pheræ came,
Longing to add new glory to the fame
Of him whose flocks Apollo once did keep,
And then Echion, who would nowise sleep
Amid Ephesian roses, or behold
Betwixt gold cups and dainty things of gold
The white limbs of the dancing-girl, her hair
Swung round her dainty loins and bosom bare ;
But needs must try the hollow-sounding sea,
As herald of the heroes, nor was he
Left by his brother Eurytus the strong.

Neither did Cæneus, the Magnesian, long
Less than the others strange new lands to see,
Though wondrous things were told of him,—that he,
Once woman, now was man by Neptune's aid,
And thus had won a long-desired maid.

From nigh Larissa came Ætalides,
Leaving a plain well-watered, set with trees,
That feeds much woolly sheep and lowing neat
And knoweth well the dancing maiden's feet.
Mopsus, like Idmon, knew of things to come,
And had in Lipara a rocky home.
Eurydamas, tired of the peaceful lake
Of Xynias, was come for Jason's sake
To lay his well-skilled hands upon the oar,
Dealing with greater waves than heretofore.

Menœtius, son of Actor, from the land
Where swift Asopus runs through stones and sand,
Bridged by the street of Opus, next was seen.
Eribotes, who through the meadows green
Would wander oft to seek what helpeth man,
Yet cannot cure his lust, through waters wan
To seek for marvels, cometh after him.
Then a rich man, grown old, but strong of limb,
Eurytion, son of Iras, leaveth now
His husbandmen still following of the plough
In the fat Theban meadows, while he goes,
Driven by fate, to suffer biting woes.

From Æchalia, Clytius the king,
And Iphitus his brother, felt the sting
That drives great men through woes to seek renown,
And left their guarded city, looking down
From rocky heights on the well-watered plain.
Right wise they were, and men say, not in vain
Before Apollo's court they claimed to be
The first who strung the fatal cornel tree,
And loosed the twanging bowstring from the ear.

Then to the gate a chariot drew a-near,
Wherein two brothers sat, whereof the one
Who held the reins was mighty Telamon ;
And Peleus was the other's dreaded name.
And from an island both the heroes came,
Sunny Ægina, where their father's hand
Ruled o'er the people of a fruitful land ;

But they now young, rejoicing in their birth,
Dreame'd not that, ere they lay beneath the earth,
Still greater heroes from their loins should come,
The doomsmen of the Trojan's godlike home.

Fair Athens, and the olive groves thereby,
Phalerus left, riding through deserts dry
And rocky passes where no sweet birds sing ;
And with him Butes, with the owlet's wing
Well painted on his shield ; and he, at least,
Came back no more to share the joyous feast
And pour out wine for well accomplished days,
Who, all besotted with the Syren's lays,
Must leave his mates ; nor happier than he,
Tiphys the pilot came, although the sea
Dealt gently with the ship whose ashen helm
His hand touched ; in the rich Bœotian realm
He left outlandish merceries stored up
With many a brazen bowl and silver cup
His heirs should feast from in the days to come,
When men he knew not, went about his home.

Next Phlias came, forgetful of the hill
That bears his name, where oft the maidens fill
Their baskets with the coal-black clustering grapes,
Far on in autumn, when the parched earth gapes
For cool November rain and winter snow,
For there his house stood, on the shaded brow
Of that fair ridge that Bacchus loves so well.

Then through the gates one with a lion's fell
Hung o'er his shoulders, on a huge grey steed
Came riding, with his fair Phœnician weed
Glittering from underneath the tawny hair,
Who loosely in his dreadful hand did bear
A club of unknown wood bound round with brass,
And underneath his curled black hair did pass
A golden circlet o'erwrought cunningly
With running beasts ; so folk knew this was he
That in Amphytrion's palace first saw light,
And whose first hour began with deadly fight,

Alcmena's son, the dreadful Hercules ;
The man whose shout the close Nemean trees
Had stifled, and the lion met in vain ;
The ravisher of hell, the serpent's bane,
Whom neither Gods nor fate could overwhelm.

Now was he come to this Thessalian realm
To serve with Jason on the wandering seas,
Half seeking fame, half wishing to appease
The wrath of her who grudged him ease and rest,
Yet needs must see him of all men the best.
Laughing he went, and with him on each hand
There rode a squire from the Theban land ;
Hylas was first, whose sire, Theodamas,
Had given him worthy gifts of gold and brass,
And gold-wrought arms, that he should see no more
Glittering along the green Ismenian shore.
With him Ephebus came, who many a year
Had backed the steed and cast the quivering spear
In Theban meadows, but whose fathers came
From Argos, and thereby had left their name.
So through the streets like Gods they rode, but he
Who rode the midmost of the glorious three
O'ertopped them by a head ; and looking down
With smiling face, whereon it seemed no frown
Could ever come, showed like the king of all.

Now coming to the palace, by the wall
Sat Jason, watching while an armourer wrought
A golden crest according to his thought ;
And round about the heroes were at play,
Casting the quoit ; but on the well-paved way,
With clanging arms, leapt down Alcmena's son
Before the prince, and said : " I have won
Some small renown, O Jason, in this land,
Come now to put my hand within your hand
And be your man, if wide report says true,
That even now with cinnabar and blue
Men paint your long ship's prow, and shave the oars

With sharpened planes ; for soothly, other shores
I fain would see than this fair Grecian one,
Wherein great deeds already I have done :
And if thou willest now to hear my name,
A Theban queen my mother once became,
And had great honour ; wherefore some men say
That in Amphytrion's bed my mother lay
When I was gotten ; and yet other some
Say that a God upon that night did come
(Whose name I speak not), like unto the king,
With whom Alcmena played, but nought witting.

“ Nor I, nor others know the certainty
Of all these things ; but certes, royally
My brother rules at Thebes, whom all men call
Amphytrion's son, in whose well-peopled hall
Ever am I the least loved guest of all,
Though, since my name is Hercules, the man
Who owes me hatred hides it if he can.

“ And now, O prince, I bid thee take my hand,
And hear me swear that till unto this land
Thou hast borne back the fleece across the sea,
Thy liege-man and thy servant I will be.
Nor have I seen a man more like a king
Than thou art, of whom minstrel folk shall sing
In days to come when men sit by the wine.”

Then Jason said : “ A happy lot is mine !
Surely the Gods must love me, since that thou
Art come, with me the rough green plain to plough
That no man reaps ; yet certes, thou alone
In after days shalt be the glorious one
Whom men shall sing of when they name the fleece
That bore the son of Athamas from Greece,
When I and all these men have come to nought.”

So spake he : but the great-eyed Juno brought
His words to nothing, stooping to behold
Jason's fair head, whereon the locks of gold
Curled thick and close, and his grey eager eyes,
That seemed already to behold the prize

In far-off Colchis : like a God he stood,
No less than he that in the darksome wood
Slew the lake-haunting, many-headed beast.

But on that day the Minyæ held a feast,
Praising the Gods, and those that they had sent
Across the sea to work out their intent.

Yea, ere the night, greater their joyance grew,
For to the throng of heroes came there two,
In nowise worse than any of the best,—
Castor and Pollux, who thought not to rest
In woody Lacedæmon, where the doves
Make summer music in the beechen groves,
But rather chose to hear the sea-fowl sing.

Their mother wedded Tyndarus the king.
And yet a greater name their father had,
As men deem ; for that Leda, all unclad,
In cold Eurotas, on a summer morn,
Bathed her fair body, unto whom was borne,
Fleeing from seeming death, a milk-white swan,
Whom straight the naked queen, not fearing man,
Took in her arms, nor knew she fostered Jove,
Who rules o'er mortal men and Gods above.

So in the hall of Pelias, in their place
The twain sat down ; and joy lit every face,
When both their names the sweet-voiced herald cried.
But the next morn into the town did ride
Lynceus and Idas, leaving far away
Well-walled Messene where the kestrels play
About the temples and the treasure-house.
But of these twain was Idas valorous
Beyond most men, and hasty of his blow ;
And unto Lynceus would the darkness show
That which he lacked ; and of all men was he
The luckiest to find the privy
Of gold or gems. And on the self-same day
Came Periclymenes, who folk did say

Had Proteus' gift to change from shape to shape.

Next from Tegea, where the long green grape
Grows yellow in the dewy autumn night,
There came Ancæus, stubborn in the fight.

Amphidamus and Apheus left the trees
Where sing the wood-doves to their mistresses
In the Arcadian forests ; and where oft,
If through the springing brake he treadeth soft,
The happy hunter may well chance to see
Beside a hidden stream some two or three
Of tired nymphs, stripping the silken weed
From off their limbs ; nor shall Acteon's meed
Betide him there among the oaken trees.

Next came there Augeas, who at Elis sees
On his fat plains the sheep, and kine, and beeves,
Unnumbered as the rustling aspen leaves
Beside the river : from the grassy plain
Anigh Pellene, where the harvest wain
Scatters the grazing sheep, Amphion came,
In nowise skilled like him who bore his name,
The deathless singer, but right wise in war.
Then through the town there passed a brazen car
Bearing Euphemus, who had power to go
Dryshod across the plain no man doth sow.
By Tenarus he dwelt, beside the sea,
Anigh the temple of the deity
Whose son he was, the shaker of the earth.

Then came a fresh Ancæus, who had birth
In woody Samos, of the self-same sire
Whose heart white-footed Alta set on fire,
As on the yellow sands at dawn she went.

Then Calydon the great a hero sent,
The fair-haired Meleager, who became,
In after-days, the glory of his name,
The greatest name of the Ætolian land ;
While yet on him fate laid her heavy hand,
In midst of all his glory so raised up,
Who nowise now dreaded the proffered cup

Of life and death she held for him to drain,
Nor thought of death and wishes wished in vain.
With him his uncle rode, Laocoon,
No longer young, teaching his brother's son
What 'longed to ruling men and unto war.

From Lacedæmon, Iphiclus afar
Had travelled, till the rich embroidered weed
His father Thestius gave him at his need
Was stained with sun and dust, but still he came
To try the sea and win undying fame.

Then came a man long-limbed, in savage weed,
Arcas the hunter, to whose unmatched speed
All beasts that wander through the woods are slow.
In his right hand he bare the fatal bow
Of horn, and wood, and brass, but now unstrung,
And at his back a well-closed quiver hung,
Done round with silver bands and leopard's skin,
And fifty deaths were hidden well therein
Of men or beasts ; for whoso stood before
His bended bow and angry eyes, no more
Should see the green trees and the fertile earth.

Then came two brothers of a wondrous birth,
Zetes and Calaïs, sons of Boreas ;
For he beheld Erechtheus' daughter pass
Along Ilissus, one bright windy day,
Whom from amidst her maids he bore away
Unto the hills of Thrace to be his bride.
Now unto them this marvel did betide,
That like fair men in all else, from the head
Of each sprung wings, wherewith at will they sped
From land to land, 'midst of the pathless air.

Next from Magnesia did roan horses bear
Phocus and Priasus, well skilled to cast
The whistling dart ; then o'er the drawbridge passed
Ætolian Palæmonius, who not yet
Had seen men armed in anger, or steel wet
With blood of ought but beasts, but none the less
Was willing now to stand among the press

Of god-like men, who, with the Minyæ,
Were armed to bring the fleece across the sea.

Then came Asclepius, whom the far-darter
Saved living from the lifeless corpse of her
He once loved well, but slew for treason done,
Fair-haired Coronis, whose far-seeing son
He honoured much, and taught so many a thing,
That first he knew how man may ease the sting
Of sickening pain, because all herbs he knew,
And what the best and worst of them could do
So many a bitter fight with death he had,
And made the heart of many a sick man glad,
And gave new life to many a man who seemed
But dead already, wherefore people deemed
When he was dead that he was God indeed,
And on his altars many a beast did bleed.

Acastus, Pelias' son, from wandering
Was come that self-same day unto the king,
And needs must go with Jason on this quest,
Careless of princely ease and golden rest.

Next Neleus, growing grey, forgetting not
The double crime, had left the pleasant spot
Where the wan Alpheus meets the green sea waves,
And twice a-day the walls of Pylos laves ;
For he was fain to expiate the sin
Pelias shared with him, long years past within
Queen Juno's temple, where the brothers slew
The old Sidero, crying out, who knew
Then first the bitterness of such a cry
As broke from Tyro in her agony
When helpless, bound, within the brazen hall,
She felt unthought-of torment on her fall,
With none to pity her, nor knew what end
The Gods unto such misery would send.
So might Sidero feel, when fell on her
Unlooked-for death and deadly, hopeless fear ;
And in their turn must Neleus o'er the sea

Go wandering now, and Pelias must be
A trembling liar till death seizes him.

But now with Neleus, young but strong of limb,
His wise, far-seeing offspring, Nestor, went,
With eyes a little downward ever bent,
Thinking of this and that which he had seen ;
Who, when his youth was flourishing and green,
Saw many feats of arms and ways of men,
Yet lived so long to be well honoured, when
In Troy the old the princes shared the spoil.

Next came Laertes to share grief and toil
With these upon the sea ; yet had he not
An easy land in Ithaca the hot,
Though Bacchus loves the ledges of the land,
And weighs the peasant in his sunburnt hand
The heavy oozing bunches, in the time
When frosts draw nigh in the rough northern clime.

Next whom came Almenus, of nought afraid,
Well armed and hardy, whom a mortal maid
Bore unto Mars, for he, new-come from Thrace,
Beside Enipeus met her, and in chase
He held her long, who vainly fled from him,
Though light of foot she was, and strong of limb.

And last of all, Orpheus the singer came,
The son of King Œger, great of fame,
Yet happier by much in this, that he
Was loved by heavenly Calliope,
Who bore him Orpheus on a happy day.
And now, through many a rough and toilsome way,
Hither he came the Minyæ to please,
And make them masters of the threatening seas,
Cheering their hearts, and making their hands strong
With the unlooked-for sweetness of his song.

Now was it eve by then that Orpheus came
Into the hall, and when they heard his name,
And toward the high-seat of the prince he drew,
All men beholding him the singer knew,

And glad they were, indeed, that he should be
Their mate upon the bitter, tuneless sea.
And loud they shouted, but Prince Jason said :—
“ Now, may the Gods bring good things on thy head,
Son of Æger, but from me, indeed,
This gold Dædalian bowl shall be thy meed,
If thou wilt let us hear thy voice take wing
From out thine heart, and see the golden string
Quiver beneath thy fingers. But by me
First sit and feast, and happy mayst thou be.”

Then, glad at heart, the hero took his place,
And ate and drank his fill, but when the space
Was cleared of flesh and bread, he took his lyre
And sung them of the building up of Tyre,
And of the fair things stored up over sea,
Till there was none of them but fain would be
Set in the ship, nor cared one man to stay
On the green earth for one more idle day.

But Jason, looking right and left on them,
Took his fair cloak, wrought with a golden hem,
And laid it upon Orpheus, and thereto
Added the promised bowl, that all men knew
No hand but that of Dædalus had wrought,
So rich it was, and fair beyond all thought.
Then did he say unto the Minyæ :—
“ Fair friends and well-loved guests, no more shall ye
Feast in this hall until we come again
Back to this land, well-guerdoned for our pain,
Bearing the fleece, and mayhap many a thing
Such as this god-like guest erewhile did sing,
Scarlet, and gold, and brass ; but without fail
Bearing great fame, if ought that may avail
To men who die ; and our names certainly
Shall never perish, wheresoe'er we lie.

“ And now behold within the haven rides
Our good ship, swinging in the changing tides,
Gleaming with gold, and blue, and cinnabar,

The long new oars beside the rowlocks are,
The sail hangs flapping in the light west wind,
Nor ought undone can any craftsman find
From stem to stern ; so is our quest begun
To-morrow at the rising of the sun.
And may Jove bring us all safe back to see
Another sun shine on this fair city,
When elders and the flower-crowned maidens meet
With tears and singing our returning feet."

So spake he, and so mighty was the shout,
That the hall shook, and shepherd-folk without
The well-walled city heard it as they went
Unto the fold across the thymy bent.

BOOK IV

BUT through the town few eyes were sealed by sleep
When the sun rose ; yea, and the upland sheep
Must guard themselves for that one morn at least
Against the wolf ; and wary doves may feast
Unscared that morning on the ripening corn,
Nor did the whetstone touch the scythe that morn ;
And all unheeded did the mackerel shoal
Make green the blue waves, or the porpoise roll
Through changing hills and valleys of the sea.

For 'twixt the thronging people solemnly
The heroes went afoot along the way
That led unto the haven of the bay,
And as they went the roses rained on them
From windows glorious with the well-wrought hem
Of many a purple cloth ; and all their spears
Were twined with flowers that the fair earth bears ;
And round their ladies' tokens were there set
About their helmets, flowery wreaths, still wet
With beaded dew of the scarce vanished night.

So as they passed, the young men at the sight
Shouted for joy, and their hearts swelled with pride ;
But scarce the elders could behold dry-eyed
The glorious show, remembering well the days
When they were able too to win them praise,
And in their hearts was hope of days to come.

Nor could the heroes leave their fathers' home
Unwept of damsels, who henceforth must hold
The empty air unto their bosoms cold,
And make their sweet complainings to the night
That heedeth not soft eyes and bosoms white.
And many such an one was there that morn,
Who, with lips parted and grey eyes forlorn,
Stood by the window and forgot to cast
Her gathered flowers as the heroes passed,
But held them still within her garment's hem,
Though many a wingèd wish she sent to them.

But on they went, and as the way they trod,
His swelling heart nigh made each man a god ;
While clashed their armour to the minstrelsy
That went before them to the doubtful sea.

And now, the streets being passed, they reached the
bay,

Where by the well-built quay long Argo lay,
Glorious with gold, and shining in the sun.
Then first they shouted, and each man begun
Against his shield to strike his brazen spear ;
And as along the quays they drew a-near,
Faster they strode and faster, till a cry
Again burst from them, and right eagerly
Into swift running did they break at last,
Till all the wind-swept quay being overpast,
They pressed across the gangway, and filled up
The hollow ship as wine a golden cup.

But Jason, standing by the helmsman's side
High on the poop, lift up his voice and cried :—
“ Look landward, heroes, once, before ye slip

The tough well-twisted hawser from the ship,
And set your eager hands to rope or oar ;
For now, behold, the king stands on the shore
Beside a new-built altar, while the priests
Lead up a hecatomb of spotless beasts,
White bulls and coal-black horses, and my sire
Lifts up the barley-cake above the fire ;
And in his hand a cup of ruddy gold
King Pelias takes ; and now may ye behold
The broad new-risen sun light up the God,
Who, holding in his hand the crystal rod
That rules the sea, stands by Dædalian art
Above his temple, set right far apart
From other houses, nigh the deep green sea.

“ And now, O fellows, from no man but me
These gifts come to the God, that, ere long years
Have drowned our laughter and dried up our tears,
We may behold that glimmering brazen God
Against the sun bear up his crystal rod
Once more, and once more cast upon this land
This cable, severed by my bloodless brand.”

So spake he, and raised up the glittering steel,
That fell, and seaward straight did Argo reel,
Set free, and smitten by the western breeze,
And raised herself against the ridgy seas,
With golden eyes turned toward the Colchian land,
Still heedful of wise Tiphys' skilful hand.

But silent sat the heroes by the oar,
Harkening the sounds borne from the lessening shore ;
The lowing of the doomed and flower-crowned beasts,
The plaintive singing of the ancient priests,
Mingled with blare of trumpets, and the sound
Of all the many folk that stood around
The altar and the temple by the sea.
So sat they pondering much and silently,
Till all the landward noises died away,
And, midmost now of the green sunny bay,

They heard no sound but washing of the seas
And piping of the following western breeze,
And heavy measured beating of the oars ;
So left the Argo the Thessalian shores.

Now Neptune, joyful of the sacrifice
Beside the sea, and all the gifts of price
That Jason gave him, sent them wind at will,
And swiftly Argo climbed each changing hill,
And ran through rippling valleys of the sea ;
Nor toiled the heroes unmelodiously,
For by the mast sat great Eager's son,
And through the harp-strings let his fingers run
Nigh soundless, and with closed lips for a while ;
But soon across his face there came a smile,
And his glad voice brake into such a song
That swiftilier sped the eager ship along.

“ O bitter sea, tumultuous sea,
Full many an ill is wrought by thee !—
Unto the wasters of the land
Thou holdest out thy wrinkled hand ;
And when they leave the conquered town,
Whose black smoke makes thy surges brown,
Driven betwixt thee and the sun,
As the long day of blood is done,
From many a league of glittering waves
Thou smilest on them and their slaves.

“ The thin bright-eyed Phœnician
Thou drawest to thy waters wan,
With ruddy eve and golden morn
Thou temptest him, until, forlorn,
Unburied, under alien skies
Cast up ashore his body lies.

“ Yea, whoso sees thee from his door,
Must ever long for more and more ;
Nor will the beechen bowl suffice,
Or homespun robe of little price,

Or hood well-woven of the fleece
Undyed, or unspiced wine of Greece ;
So sore his heart is set upon
Purple, and gold, and cinnamon ;
For as thou cravest, so he craves,
Until he rolls beneath thy waves.
Nor in some landlocked, unknown bay,
Can satiate thee for one day.

“ Now, therefore, O thou bitter sea,
With no long words we pray to thee,
But ask thee, hast thou felt before
Such strokes of the long ashen oar ?
And hast thou yet seen such a prow
Thy rich and niggard waters plough ?

“ Nor yet, O sea, shalt thou be cursed,
If at thy hands we gain the worst,
And, wrapt in water, roll about
Blind-eyed, unheeding song or shout,
Within thine eddies far from shore,
Warmed by no sunlight any more.

“ Therefore, indeed, we joy in thee,
And praise thy greatness, and will we
Take at thy hands both good and ill,
Yea, what thou wilt, and praise thee still,
Enduring not to sit at home,
And wait until the last days come,
When we no more may care to hold
White bosoms under crowns of gold,
And our dulled hearts no longer are
Stirred by the clangorous noise of war,
And hope within our souls is dead,
And no joy is remembered.

“ So, if thou hast a mind to slay,
Fair prize thou hast of us to-day ;
And if thou hast a mind to save,
Great praise and honour shalt thou have ;
But whatso thou wilt do with us,

Our end shall not be piteous,
Because our memories shall live
When folk forget the way to drive
The black keel through the heaped-up sea,
And half dried up thy waters be."

Then shouted all the heroes, and they drove
The good ship forth, so that the birds above,
With long white wings, scarce flew so fast as they.
And so they laboured well-nigh all the day,
And ever in their ears divine words rung,
For midmost of them still the Thracian sung
Stories of Gods and men ; the bitter life
Pandora brought to luckless men ; the strife
'Twixt Pallas and the Shaker of the Earth,
The theft of Bacchus, and the wondrous birth
Of golden Venus. Natheless, when the sun
To fall adown the heavens had begun,
They trimmed the sails, and drew the long oars up,
And, having poured wine from a golden cup
Unto the Gods, gladdened their hearts with food ;
Then, having feasted as they thought it good,
Set hands upon the oars again, and so
Toiled on, until the broad sun, growing low,
Reddened the green sea ; then they held their hands
Till he should come again from unknown lands,
And fell to meat again, and sat so long
Over the wine-cups, cheered with tale and song,
That night fell on them, and the moon rose high,
And the fair western wind began to die,
Though still they drifted slowly towards the east ;
Then with sweet sleep the others crowned their feast,
But Tiphys and the leader of the rest,
Who watched till drew the round moon to the west,
And Jason could behold beneath her light,
Far off at first, a little speck of white,
Which, as the grey dawn stole across the sea,
And the wind freshened, grew at last to be

Grey rocks and great, and when they nigher drew,
The skilful helmsman past all doubting knew
The land of Lemnos ; therefore from their sleep
They roused their fellows, bidding them to keep
The good ship from that evil rocky shore.
So each man set his hand unto the oar,
And, striking sail, along the coast they crept,
Till the sun rose, and birds no longer slept ;
Then as they went they saw a sandy beach
Under the cliff, that no high wave could reach,
And in the rock a deep cave cut, whereby
A man was standing, gazing earnestly
Upon their ship, and shouting words that, tost
Hither and thither by the wind, were lost
Amid the tumbling of the ridgy sea :
Natheless, they deemed that he still prayed to be
Their fellow, and to leave those rocky shores ;
Therefore, with backing of the ashen oars,
They stayed the ship, and beckoned unto him
To try the sea, if so be he could swim,
Because, indeed, they doubted there might be
A-nigh the place some hidden enemy ;
Nor cared they much to trust their oaken keel
Too near those rocks, as deadly as sharp steel,
That lay upon their lee ; but with a shout
He sprang into the sea, and beat about
The waters bravely, till he reached the ship ;
And clambering up, let the salt water drip
From off his naked limbs, nor spoke he ought
Until before the fair prince he was brought.
But Jason, when he set his eyes on him,
And saw him famished and so gaunt of limb,
Bade them to give him food and wine enow
Before he told his tale ; and still to row
Along the high cliffs eastward, nor to stay
For town or tower, haven or deep bay.
Then being clothed and fed, the island man
Came back to Jason, and his tale began :—

“ O Lord, or Prince, or whoso thou mayst be,
Great thanks I give thee ; yet, I pray, of me,
Ask not my name, for surely ere this day
Both name, and house, and friends have past away.
A Lemnian am I, who within the town
Had a fair house, and on the thymy down
Full many a head of sheep : and I had too
A daughter, old enough for men to woo,
A wife and three fair sons ; of whom the first
For love and gold had now begun to thirst :
Full rich I was, and led a pleasant life,
Nor did I long for more, or doubt for strife.

“ Know that in Lemnos were the Gods well served,
And duly all their awful rites observed,
Save only that no temple Venus had,
And from no altars was her heart made glad ;
Wherefore for us she wove a bitter fate,
For by her power she set an evil hate
Of man, like madness in each woman's heart,
And heavy sleep on us men, for our part,
From which few woke, or woke in time to feel
Against their throats the pitiless sharp steel.

“ But that there might be one to tell the thing,
Nigh dawn I woke, and turning, thought to cling
Unto the warm side of my well-loved wife,
But found nought there but a keen two-edged knife.
So, wondering much, I gat me from the bed,
And going thence, found all the floor be-bled
In my son's sleeping place, and nigh the door
His body, hacked and hewn, upon the floor :
Naked he was, but in his clenched right hand
Held tufts of woman's hair. Then did I stand
As in a dream a man stands, when draws nigh
The thing he fears with such wild agony,
Yet dares not flee from ; but the golden sun
Came forth at last, and daylight was begun ;
Then trembling I took heart to leave at last
The lonely house, but, as I slowly passed

Into the porch, a dreadful noise I heard,
Nor shall I be again by ought so feared,
How long soe'er I live, as I was then,
Because that shout was worse than cries of men
Drunken with blood ; but yet as in a dream
I went to meet it, and heard many a scream
From dying men ; but, as I gained the street,
Men flying for their dear lives did I meet,
And turned and fled with them, I knew not why,
But looking back in running, could espy,
With shrinking horror, what kept up the chase.
" Because, indeed, the old familiar place,
From house-wall unto house-wall, was now filled
With frantic women, whose thin voices shrilled
With unknown war-cries ; little did they heed
If, as they tore along, their flesh did bleed
So that some man was slain, nor feared they now
If they each other smote with spear or bow,
For all were armed in some sort, and had set
On head or breast what armour they might get ;
And some were naked else, and some were clad
In such-like raiment as the slain men had,
And some their kirtles wore looped up or rent.
" So ever at us shafts and spears they sent,
And through the street came on like a huge wave,
Until at last against the gates they drave,
And we gained on them, till some two or three,
As still the others strove confusedly,
Burst from the press, and, heading all the rest,
Ran mightily, and the last men, hard pressed,
Turned round upon them, and straightway were slain,
Unarmed and faint, and 'gan the crowd to gain
Upon the fleeing men, till one by one
They fell, and looked their last upon the sun,
And I alone was held in chase, until
I reached the top of a high thymy hill
Above the sea, bleeding from arm and back,
Wherein two huntsmen's arrows lightly stack,

Shot by no practised hands ; but nigh my death
I was indeed, empty of hope and breath.

“ Yet, ere their changed hands could be laid on me,
I threw myself into the boiling sea,
And they turned back, nor doubted I was dead ;
But I, though fearing much to show my head,
Got me, by swimming, to yon little beach,
And there the mouth of yon cave scarce could reach,
And lay there fainting till the sun was high.
Then I awoke, and, rising fearfully,
Gat into the dark cave, and there have been,
How long I know not, and no man have seen ;
And as for food and drink, within the cave
Good store of sweet clear water did I have,
And in the nights I went along the beach
And got me shell-fish, and made shift to reach
Some few birds' eggs ; but nathless, misery
Must soon have slain me, had not the kind sea
Sent you, O lords, to give me life again ;
Therefore, I pray, ye may not wish in vain
For ought, and that with goods and happiness
The Father of all folk your lives may bless.”

Then said the prince : “ And be thou strong of heart,
For, after all thy woes, shalt thou have part
In this our quest, if so thou willest it ;
But if so be that thou wouldst rather sit
In rest and peace within a fair homestead,
That shall some king give to thee by my head,
For love of me ; or else for very fear
Shall some man give thee what thou countest dear.

“ And if thou askest of us, know that we
Are children of the conquering Minyæ,
And make for Colchis o'er the watery plain,
And think we shall not fail to bring again
The fleece of Neptune's ram to Thessaly.”

“ Prince,” said the Lemnian, “ I will go with thee
Whereso thou willest, neither have I will
To wait again for ruin, sitting still

Among such goods as grudging fate will give,
Even at the longest, only while I live."

Then Jason bade them bring him arms well wrought
And robes of price ; and when all these were brought,
And he was armed, he seemed a goodly man.

Meanwhile, along the high cliffs Argo ran
Until a fresh land-wind began to rise,
Then did they set sail, and in goodly wise
Draw off from Lemnos, and at close of day
Again before them a new country lay,
Which when they neared, the helmsman Tiphys knew
To be the Mysian land ; being come thereto,
They saw a grassy shore and trees enow,
And a sweet stream that from the land did flow ;
Therefore they thought it good to land thereon
And get them water ; but, the day being gone,
They anchored till the dawn anigh the beach,
Till the sea's rim the golden sun did reach.
But when the day dawned, most men left the ship,
Some hasting the glazed water-jars to dip
In the fresh water ; others among these
Who had good will beneath the murmuring trees
To sit awhile, forgetful of the sea.
And with the sea-farers there landed three
Amongst the best, Alcmena's godlike son,
Hylas the fair, and that half-halting one,
Great Polyphemus. Now both Hercules
And all the others lay beneath the trees,
When all the jars were filled, nor wandered far ;
But Hylas, governed by some wayward star,
Strayed from them, and up stream he set his face,
And came unto a tangled woody place,
From whence the stream came, and within that wood
Along its bank wandered in heedless mood,
Nor knew it haunted of the sea-nymphs fair,
Whom on that morn the heroes' noise did scare
From their abiding-place anigh the bay ;

But these now hidden in the water lay
Within the wood, and thence could they behold
The fair-limbed Hylas, with his hair of gold,
And mighty arms down-swinging carelessly,
And fresh face, ruddy from the wind-swept sea ;
Then straight they loved him, and, being fain to have
His shapely body in the glassy wave,
And taking counsel there, they thought it good
That one should meet him in the darksome wood,
And by her wiles should draw him to some place
Where they his helpless body might embrace.

So from the water stole a fair nymph forth,
And by her art so wrought, that from the north
You would have thought her come, from where a queen
Rules over lands summer alone sees green ;
For she in goodly raiment, furred, was clad,
And on her head a golden fillet had,
Strange of its fashion, and about her shone
Many a fair jewel and outlandish stone.

So in the wood, anigh the river side,
The coming of the Theban did she bide,
Nor waited long, for slowly pushing through
The close-set saplings, o'er the flowers blue
He drew nigh, singing, free from any care ;
But when he saw her glittering raiment fair
Betwixt the green tree-trunks, he stayed a space,
For she, with fair hands covering up her face,
Was wailing loud, as though she saw him not,
And to his mind came old tales half forgot,
Of women of the woods, the huntsman's bane.

Yet with his fate indeed he strove in vain ;
For, going further forward warily,
From tree-trunk unto tree-trunk, he could see
Her lovely hands, with wrist set close to wrist,
Her cheek as fair as any God has kissed,
Her lovely neck and wealth of golden hair,
That from its fillet straggled here and there,
And all her body writhing in distress,

Wrapped in the bright folds of her golden dress.

Then forthwith he drew near her eagerly,
Nor did she seem to know that he was nigh,
Until almost his hand on her was laid ;
Then, lifting up a pale wild face, she said,
Struggling with sobs and shrinking from his hand :—
“ O, fair young warrior of a happy land,
Harm not a queen, I pray thee, for I come
From the far northland, where yet sits at home
The king, my father, who, since I was wooed
By a rich lord of Greece, had thought it good
To send me to him with a royal train,
But they, their hearts being changed by hope of gain,
Seized on my goods, and left me while I slept ;
Nor do I know, indeed, what kind God kept
Their traitorous hands from slaying me outright ;
And surely yet, the lion-haunted night
Shall make an end of me, who erewhile thought
That unto lovelier lands I was being brought,
To live a happier life than heretofore.

“ But why think I of past times any more,
Who, a king's daughter once, am now grown fain
Of poorest living, through all toil and pain,
If so I may but live : and thou, indeed,
Perchance art come, some God, unto my need ;
For nothing less thou seemest, verily.
But if thou art a man, let me not die,
But take me as thy slave, that I may live.
For many a gem my raiment has to give,
And these weak fingers surely yet may learn
To turn the mill, and carry forth the urn
Unto the stream, nor shall my feet unshod,
Shrink from the flinty road and thistly sod.”

She ceased ; but he stooped down, and stammering
said :

“ Mayst thou be happy, O most lovely maid,
And thy sweet life yet know a better day

And I will strive to bring thee on thy way,
Who am the well-loved son of a rich man
Who dwells in Thebes, beside Ismenus wan."
Therewith he reached his hand to her, and she
Let her slim palm fall in it daintily ;
But with that touch he felt as through his blood
Strange fire ran, and saw not the close wood,
Nor tangled path, nor stream, nor ought but her
Crouching before him in her gold and fur,
With kind appealing eyes raised up to his,
And red lips trembling for the coming kiss.

But ere his lips met hers did she arise,
Reddening with shame, and from before his eyes
Drew her white hand, wherewith the robe of gold
She gathered up, and from her feet did hold,
Then through the tangled wood began to go,
Not looking round ; but he cared not to know
Whither they went, so only she was nigh.
So to her side he hurried fearfully,
She nought gainsaying, but with eyes downcast
Still by his side betwixt the low boughs past,
Following the stream, until a space of green
All bare of trees they reached, and there-between
The river ran, grown broad and like a pool,
Along whose bank a flickering shade and cool
Grey willows made, and all about they heard
The warble of the small brown river bird.
And from both stream and banks rose up a haze
Quivering and glassy, for of summer days
This was the chiefest day and crown of all.

There did the damsel let her long skirts fall
Over her feet, but as her hand dropped down,
She felt it stopped by Hylas' fingers brown,
Whereat she trembled and began to go
Across the flowery grass with footsteps slow,
As though she grew aweary, and she said,
Turning about her fair and glorious head :
" Soft is the air in your land certainly,

But under foot the way is rough and dry
Unto such feet as mine, more used to feel
The dainty stirrup wrought of gold and steel,
Or tread upon the white bear's fell, or pass
In spring and summer o'er such flowery grass
As this, that soothly mindeth me too much
Of that my worshipped feet were wont to touch,
When I was called a queen ; let us not haste
To leave this sweet place for the tangled waste,
I pray thee, therefore, prince, but let us lie
Beneath these willows while the wind goes by,
And set our hearts to think of happy things,
Before the morrow pain and trouble brings."

She faltered somewhat as she spoke, but he
Drew up before her and took lovingly
Her other hand, nor spoke she more to him,
Nor he to her awhile, till, from the rim
Of his great shield, broke off the leather band
That crossed his breast, whether some demon's hand
Snapped it unseen, or some sharp, rugged bough
Within the wood had chafed it even now ;
But clattering fell the buckler to the ground,
And, startled at the noise, he turned him round,
Then, grown all bold within that little space,
He set his cheek unto her blushing face,
And smiling, in a low voice said :

" O sweet,
Call it an omen that this, nowise meet
For deeds of love, has left me by its will,
And now by mine these toys that cumber still
My arms shall leave me."

And therewith he threw
His brass-bound spear upon the grass, and drew
The Theban blade from out its ivory sheath,
And loosed his broad belt's clasp, that like a wreath
His father's Indian serving-man had wrought,
And cast his steel coat off, from Persia brought ;
And so at last being freed of brass and steel,

Upon his breast he laid her hand to feel
The softness of the fine Phœnician stuff
That clad it still, nor yet could toy enough
With that fair hand ; so played they for a space,
Till softly did she draw him to a place
Anigh the stream, and they being set, he said :
“ And what dost thou, O love ? art thou afraid
To cast thine armour off, as I have done,
Within this covert where the fiery sun
Scarce strikes upon one jewel of your gowls ? ”
Then she spake, reddening, with her eyes cast
down :

“ O prince, behold me as I am to-day,
But if o'er many a rough and weary way
It hap unto us both at last to come
Unto the happy place that is thine home,
Then let me be as women of thy land
When they before the sea-born goddess stand,
And not one flower hides them from her sight.”

But with that word she set her fingers white
Upon her belt, and he said amorously :
“ Ah, God, whatso thou wilt must surely be,
But would that I might die or be asleep
Till we have gone across the barren deep,
And you and I together, hand in hand,
Some day, ere sunrise lights the quiet land,
Behold once more the seven gleaming gates.”

“ O love,” she said, “ and such a fair time waits
Both thee and me ; but now to give thee rest,
Here, in the noontide, were it not the best
To soothe thee with some gentle murmuring song,
Sung to such notes as to our folk belong ;
Such as my maids awhile ago would sing
When on my bed a-nights I lay waking ? ”

“ Sing on,” he said, “ but let me dream of bliss
If I should sleep, nor yet forget thy kiss.”
She touched his lips with hers, and then began
A sweet song sung not yet to any man.

" I know a little garden close
Set thick with lily and red rose,
Where I would wander if I might
From dewy dawn to dewy night,
And have one with me wandering.

" And though within it no birds sing,
And though no pillared house is there,
And though the apple boughs are bare
Of fruit and blossom, would to God,
Her feet upon the green grass trod,
And I beheld them as before.

" There comes a murmur from the shore,
And in the place two fair streams are,
Drawn from the purple hills afar,
Drawn down unto the restless sea ;
The hills whose flowers ne'er fed the bee,
The shore no ship has ever seen,
Still beaten by the billows green,
Whose murmur comes unceasingly
Unto the place for which I cry.

" For which I cry both day and night,
For which I let slip all delight,
That maketh me both deaf and blind,
Careless to win, unskilled to find,
And quick to lose what all men seek.

" Yet tottering as I am, and weak,
Still have I left a little breath
To seek within the jaws of death
An entrance to that happy place,
To seek the unforgotten face
Once seen, once kissed, once reft from me
Anigh the murmuring of the sea."

She ceased her song, that lower for a while
And slower too had grown, and a soft smile
Grew up within her eyes as still she sung.
Then she rose up and over Hylas hung,
For now he slept ; wherewith the God in her

Consumed the northern robe done round with fur
That hid her beauty, and the light west wind
Played with her hair no fillet now did bind,
And through her faint grey garment her limbs seemed
Like ivory in the sea, and the sun gleamed
In the strange jewels round her middle sweet,
And in the jewelled sandals on her feet.

So stood she murmuring till a rippling sound
She heard, that grew until she turned her round
And saw her other sisters of the deep
Her song had called while Hylas yet did sleep,
Come swimming in a long line up the stream,
And their white dripping arms and shoulders gleam
Above the dark grey water as they went,
And still before them a great ripple sent.

But when they saw her, toward the bank they drew,
And landing, felt the grass and flowers blue
Against their unused feet ; then in a ring
Stood gazing with wide eyes, and wondering
At all his beauty they desired so much.
And then with gentle hands began to touch
His hair, his hands, his closed eyes ; and at last
Their eager naked arms about him cast,
And bore him, sleeping still, as by some spell,
Unto the depths where they were wont to dwell ;
Then softly down the reedy bank they slid,
And with small noise the gurgling river hid
The flushed nymphs and the heedless sleeping man.

But ere the water covered them, one ran
Across the mead and caught up from the ground
The brass-bound spear, and buckler bossed and round,
The ivory-hilted sword, and coat of mail,
Then took the stream ; so what might tell the tale,
Unless the wind should tell it, or the bird
Who from the reed these things had seen and heard ?

Meanwhile, the ship being watered, and the day
Now growing late, the prince would fain away ;

So from the ship was blown a horn to call
The stragglers back, who mustered one and all,
But Theban Hylas ; therefore, when they knew
That he was missing, Hercules withdrew
From out the throng, if yet perchance his voice
Hylas might hear, and all their hearts rejoice
With his well-known shout in reply thereto ;
With him must Polyphemus likewise go,
To work out the wise counsel of the fates,
Unhappy, who no more would see the gates
Of white-walled fair Larissa, or the plain
Burdened by many an overladen wain.

For, while their cries and shouts rang through the wood,
The others reached the ship, and thought it good
To weigh the anchor, and anigh the shore,
With loosened sail, and run-out ready oar,
To trim the ship for leaving the fair bay ;
And therefore, Juno, waiting for that day,
And for that hour, had gathered store of wind
Up in the hills to work out all her mind,
Which, from the Mysian mountains now let slip,
Tearing along the low shore, smote the ship
In blinding clouds of salt spray mixed with rain.

Then vainly they struck sail, and all in vain
The rowers strove to keep her head to wind,
And still they drifted seaward, drenched and blind.

But, 'mid their struggling, suddenly there shone
A light from Argo's high prow, and thereon
Could their astonished, fearful eyes behold
A figure standing, with wide wings of gold,
Upright, amid the weltering of the sea,
Calm 'midst the noise and cries, and presently
To all their ears a voice pierced, saying : " No more,
O Jove-blessed heroes, strive to reach the shore,
Nor seek your lost companions, for of these
Jove gives you not the mighty Hercules
To help you forward on your happy way,
But wills him in the Greek land still to stay,

Where many a thing he has for him to do,
With whom awhile shall Polyphemus go,
Then build in Mysia a fair merchant-town,
And when long years have passed, there lay him down :
And as for Hylas, never think to see
His body more, who yet lies happily
Beneath the green stream where ye were this morn,
And there he praises Jove that he was born,
Forgetting the rough world, and every care ;
Not dead, nor living, among faces fair,
White limbs, and wonders of the watery world.

“ And now I bid ye spread the sail ye furled,
And make on towards the straits while Juno sends
Fair wind behind you, calling you her friends.”

Therewith the voice ceased, and the storm was still,
And afterward they had good wind at will,
To help them toward the straits, but all the rest,
Rejoicing at the speeding of their quest,
Yet wondered much whence that strange figure came,
That on the prow burnt like a harmless flame ;
Yea, some must go and touch the empty space
From whence those words flew from the godlike face ;
But Jason and the builder, Argus, knew
Whereby the prow foretold things strange and new,
Nor wondered ought, but thanked the Gods therefore,
As far astern they left the Mysian shore.

The Fifth Book tells of the Death of Cyzicus, and how Phineus was freed from the Harpies. The Sixth contains the story of the passage of the Symplegades, and tells how the heroes come to Ææa. The following passage from the latter Book describes the landing.

Now drawing quickly nigh the landing-place,
Little by little did they slack their pace,

Till half a bowshot from the shore they lay,
Then Jason shouted : " What do ye to-day
All armed, O warriors ? and what town is this
That here by seeming ye have little bliss
Of quiet life, but, smothered up in steel,
Ye needs must meet each harmless merchant keel
That nears your haven, though perchance it bring
Good news, and many a much-desired thing
That ye may get good cheap ? and such are we,
But wayfarers upon the troublous sea,
Careful of that stored up within our hold,
Phœnician scarlet, spice, and Indian gold,
Deep dyeing-earths, and woad and cinnabar,
Wrought arms and vessels, and all things that are
Desired much by dwellers in all lands ;
Nor doubt us friends, although indeed our hands
Lack not for weapons, for the unfenced head,
Where we have been, soon lies among the dead."

So spake he with a smiling face, nor lied ;
For he, indeed, was purposed to have tried
To win the fleece neither by war or stealth ;
But by an open hand and heaps of wealth,
If so it might be, bear it back again,
Nor with a handful fight a host in vain.

But being now silent, at the last he saw
A stir among those folk, who 'gan to draw
Apart to right and left, leaving a man
Alone amidst them, unarmed, with a wan
And withered face, and black beard mixed with grey
That swept his girdle, who these words did say :—

" O seafarers, I give you now to know
That on this town oft falleth many a foe,
Therefore not lightly may folk take the land
With helm on head, and naked steel in hand ;
Now, since indeed ye folk are but a few,
We fear you not, yet fain would that we knew
Your names and countries, since within this town
Of Æa may a good man lay him down

And fear for nought, at least while I am king,
Æetes, born to heed full many a thing."

Now Jason, hearing this desired name
He thought to hear, grown hungrier for fame,
With eager heart, and fair face flushed for pride,
Said : " King Æetes, if not over wide
My name is known, that yet may come to be,
For I am Jason of the Minyæ,
And through great perils have I come from Greece ;
And now, since this is Æa, and the fleece
Thou slayedst once a guest to get, hangs up
Within thine house, take many a golden cup,
And arms, and dyestuffs, cloth, and spice, and gold,
Yea, all the goods that lie within our hold ;
Which are not mean, for neither have we come
Leaving all things of price shut up at home,
Nor have we seen the faces of great kings
And left them giftless ; therefore take these things
And be our friend ; or, few folk as we are,
The Gods and we may bring thee bitter care."

Then spake Æetes : " Not for any word,
Or for the glitter of thy bloodless sword,
O youngling, will I give the fleece to thee,
Nor yet for gifts,—for what are such to me ?
Behold, if all thy folk joined hand to hand
They should not, striving, be enough to stand
And girdle round my bursting treasure-house ;
Yet, since of this thing thou art amorous,
And I love men, and hold the Gods in fear,
If thou and thine will land, then mayst thou hear
What great things thou must do to win the fleece ;
Then, if thou wilt not dare it, go in peace.
But come now, thou shalt hear it amidst wine
And lovely things, and songs well-nigh divine,
And all the feasts that thou hast shared erewhile
With other kings, to mine shall be but vile.
Lest thou shouldst name me, coming to thy land,
A poor guest-fearing man, of niggard hand."

So spake he outwardly, but inly thought,
" Within two days this lading shall be brought
To lie amongst my treasures with the best,
While 'neath the earth these robbers lie at rest."

But Jason said : " King, if these things be such
As man may do, I shall not fear them much,
And at thy board will I feast merrily
To-night, if on the morrow I must die ;
And yet, beware of treason, since for nought
Such lives as ours by none are lightly bought.

" Draw on, O heroes, to the shore, if ye
Are willing still this great king's house to see."

Thereat was Argo brought up to the shore,
And straight all landed from her, less and more,
And the king spake to Jason honied words,
And idle were all spears, and sheathed all swords,
As toward the palace they were gently brought.
But Jason, smiling outwardly, yet thought
Within his heart : " All this is fair enow,
Yet do I think it but an empty show ;
Natheless, until the end comes, will not I,
Like a bad player, spoil the bravery
By breaking out before they call my turn,
And then of me some mastery they may learn."

Amidst these thoughts, between the fair streets led,
He noted well the size and goodly-head
Of all the houses, and the folk well clad,
And armed as though good store of wealth they had,
Peering upon them with a wondering gaze.
At last a temple, built in ancient days
Ere Æa was a town, they came unto ;
Huge was it, but not fair unto the view
Of one beholding from without, but round
The ancient place they saw a spot of ground
Where laurels grew each side the temple door,
And two great images set up before
The brazen doors, whereof the one was She,

Who draws this way and that the fitful sea ;
The other the great God, the Life of man,
Who makes the brown earth green, the green earth wan,
From spring to autumn, through quick following days,
The lovely archer with his crown of rays.

Now over against this temple, towering high
Above all houses, rose majestically
Æetes' marble house : silent it stood,
Brushed round by doves, though many a stream of blood
Had trickled o'er its stones since it was built,
But now, unconscious of all woe and guilt,
It drank the sunlight that fair afternoon.

Then spake Æetes : " Stranger, thou shalt soon
Hear all thou wouldst hear in my house of gold ;
Yet ere thou enterest the door, behold
That ancient temple of the Far Darter,
And know that thy desire hangeth there,
Against the gold wall of the inmost shrine,
Guarded by seven locks, whose keys are thine
When thou hast done what else thou hast to do,
And thou mayst well be bold to come thereto."

" King," said the prince, " fear not, but do thy part,
Nor look to see me turn back faint of heart,
Though I may die as my forefathers died,
Who, living long, their loved souls failed to hide
From death at last, however wise they were.
But verily, O King, thy house is fair,
And here I think to see full many a thing
Men love ; so, whatso the next day may bring,
Right merrily shall pass these coming hours
Amidst fair things and wine-cups crowned with flowers."
" Enter, O guests," the king said, " and doubt not
Ye shall see things to make the heart grow hot
With joy and longing."

As he spoke, within
Blew up the horns, as when a king doth win
His throne at last, and from behind, the men

Who hedged the heroes in, shouted as when
He stands up on his throne, hidden no more.
Then those within threw open wide the door,
And straight the king took Jason by the hand,
And entered, and the Minyæ did stand
In such a hall as there has never been
Before or afterwards, since Ops was queen.

The pillars, made the mighty roof to hold,
The one was silver and the next was gold,
All down the hall ; the roof, of some strange wood
Brought over sea, was dyed as red as blood,
Set thick with silver flowers, and delight
Of intertwining figures wrought aright.
With richest webs the marble walls were hung,
Picturing sweet stories by the poets sung
From ancient days, so that no wall seemed there,
But rather forests black and meadows fair,
And streets of well-built towns, with tumbling seas
About their marble wharves and palaces ;
And fearful crags and mountains ; and all trod
By many a changing foot of nymph and God,
Spear-shaking warrior and slim-ankled maid.

The floor, moreover, of the place was laid
With coloured stones, wrought like a flowery mead ;
And ready to the hand for every need,
Midmost the hall, two fair streams trickled down
O'er wondrous gem-like pebbles, green and brown,
Betwixt smooth banks of marble, and therein
Bright-coloured fish shone through the water thin.

Now 'midst these wonders were there tables spread,
Whither the wondering seafarers were led,
And there with meat and drink full delicate
Were feasted, and strange dainty things they ate,
Of unused savour, and drank godlike wine ;
While from the golden galleries, divine,
Heart-softening music breathed about the place ;
And 'twixt the pillars, at a gentle pace,
Passed lovely damsels, raising voices sweet

And shrill unto the music, while their feet
From thin dusk raiment now and then would gleam
Upon the polished edges of the stream.

Long sat the Minyæ there, and for their parts
Few words they said, because, indeed, their hearts,
O'er-burdened with delight, still dreaded death ;
Nor did they think that they might long draw breath
In such an earthly Paradise as this,
But looked to find sharp ending to their bliss.

BOOK VII

So long they sat, until at last the sun
Sank in the sea, and noisy day was done.
Then bade Æetes light the place, that they
Might turn grim-looking night into the day ;
Whereon, the scented torches being brought,
As men with shaded eyes the shadows sought,
Turning to Jason, spake the king these words :—
“ Dost thou now wonder, guest, that with sharp
swords
And mailèd breasts of men I fence myself,
Not as a pedler guarding his poor pelf,
But as a God shutting the door of heaven.
Behold ! O Prince, for threescore years and seven
Have I dwelt here in bliss, nor dare I give
The fleece to thee, lest I should cease to live ;
Nor dare I quite this treasure to withhold,
Lest to the Gods I seem grown over-bold ;
For many a cunning man I have, to tell
Divine foreshowings of the oracle,
And thus they warn me. Therefore shalt thou hear
What well may fill a hero's heart with fear ;
But not from my old lips ; that thou mayst have,
Whether thy life thou here wilt spill or save,

At least one joy before thou comest to die :—
Ho ye, bid in my lady presently ! ”

But Jason, wondering what should come of this,
With heart well steeled to suffer woe or bliss,
Sat waiting, while within the music ceased,
But from without a strain rose and increased,
Till shrill and clear it drew anigh the hall,
But silent at the entry did it fall ;
And through the place there was no other sound
But falling of light footsteps on the ground,
For at the door a band of maids was seen ;
Who went up towards the dais, a lovely queen
Being in their midst, who, coming nigh the place
Where the king sat, passed at a gentle pace
Alone before the others to the board,
And said : “ Æetes, father, and good lord,
What is it thou wouldst have of me to-night ? ”

“ O daughter,” said Æetes, “ tell aright
Unto this king’s son here, who is my guest,
What things he must accomplish, ere his quest
Is finished, who has come this day to seek
The golden fell brought hither by the Greek,
The son of Athamas, the unlucky king,
That he may know at last for what a thing
He left the meadowy land and peaceful stead.”

Then she to Jason turned her golden head,
And reaching out her lovely arm, took up
From off the board a rich fair-jewelled cup,
And said : “ O Prince, these hard things must ye do :—
First, going to their stall, bring out the two
Great brazen bulls, the king my father feeds
On grass of Pontus and strange-nurtured seeds ;
Nor heed what they may do, but take the plough
That in their stall stands ever bright enow,
And on their gleaming necks cast thou the yoke,
And drive them as thou mayst, with cry and stroke,
Through the grey acre of the God of War.

“ Then, when turned up the long straight furrows are,

Take thou the sack that holds the serpents' teeth
Our fathers slew upon the sunless heath ;
There sow those evil seeds, and bide thou there
Till they send forth a strange crop, nothing fair,
Which garner thou, if thou canst 'scape from death.

" But if thereafter still thou drawest breath,
Then shalt thou have the seven keys of the shrine
Wherein the beast's fair golden locks yet shine ;
But yet sing not the song of triumph then,
Or think thyself the luckiest of men ;
For just within the brazen temple-gates
The guardian of the fleece for ever waits,—
A fork-tongued dragon, charmed for evermore
To writhe and wallow on the precious floor,
Sleepless, upon whose skin no steel will bite.

" If then with such an one thou needs must fight,
Or knowest arts to tame him, do thy worst,
Nor, carrying off the prize, shalt thou be curst
By us or any God. But yet, think well
If these three things be not impossible
To any man ; and make a bloodless end
Of this thy quest, and as my father's friend
Well gifted, in few days return in peace,
Lacking for nought, forgetful of the fleece."

Therewith she made an end ; but while she spoke
Came Love unseen, and cast his golden yoke
About them both, and sweeter her voice grew,
And softer ever, as betwixt them flew,
With fluttering wings, the new-born, strong desire ;
And when her eyes met his grey eyes, on fire
With that that burned her, then with sweet new shame
Her fair face reddened, and there went and came
Delicious tremors through her. But he said :—

" A bitter song thou singest, royal maid,
Unto a sweet tune ; yet doubt not that I
To-morrow this so certain death will try ;
And dying, may perchance not pass unwept,

And with sweet memories may my name be kept,
That men call Jason of the Minyæ."

Then said she, trembling : " Take, then, this of me,
And drink in token that thy life is passed,
And that thy reckless hand the die has cast."

Therewith she reached the cup to him, but he
Stretched out his hand, and took it joyfully,
As with the cup he touched her dainty hand,
Nor was she loth, awhile with him to stand,
Forgetting all else in that honied pain.

At last she turned, and with head raised again
He drank, and swore for nought to leave that quest
Till he had reached the worst end or the best ;
And down the hall the clustering Minyæ
Shouted for joy his godlike face to see.
But she, departing, made no further sign
Of her desires, but, while with song and wine
They feasted till the fevered night was late,
Within her chamber sat, made blind by fate.

But, when all hushed and still the palace grew,
She put her gold robes off, and on her drew
A dusky gown, and with a wallet small
And cutting wood-knife girt herself withal,
And from her dainty chamber softly passed
Through stairs and corridors, until at last
She came down to a gilded water-gate,
Which with a golden key she opened straight,
And swiftly stepped into a little boat,
And, pushing off from shore, began to float
Adown the stream, and with her tender hands
And half-bared arms, the wonder of all lands,
Rowed strongly through the starlit gusty night
As though she knew the watery way aright.

So, from the city being gone apace,
Turning the boat's head, did she near a space
Where, by the water's edge, a thick yew wood
Made a black blot on the dim gleaming flood :

But when she reached it, dropping either oar
Upon the grassy bank, she leapt ashore
And to a yew-bough made the boat's head fast.
Then here and there quick glances did she cast
And listened, lest some wanderer should be nigh.
Then by the river's side she tremblingly
Undid the bands that bound her yellow hair
And let it float about her, and made bare
Her shoulder and right arm, and, kneeling down,
Drew off her shoes, and girded up her gown,
And in the river washed her silver feet
And trembling hands, and then turned round to meet
The yew-wood's darkness, gross and palpable,
As though she made for some place known full well.

Beneath her feet the way was rough enow,
And often would she meet some trunk or bough,
And draw back shrinking, then press on again
With eager steps, not heeding fear or pain ;
At last an open space she came unto,
Where the faint glimmering starlight, shining through,
Showed in the midst a circle of smooth grass,
Through which, from dark to dark, a stream did pass,
And all around was darkness like a wall.
So, kneeling there, she let the wallet fall,
And from it drew a bundle of strange wood
Wound all about with strings as red as blood ;
Then breaking these, into a little pyre
The twigs she built, and swiftly kindling fire,
Set it alight, and with her head bent low
Sat patiently, and watched the red flames grow
Till it burned bright and lit the dreary place ;
Then, leaving it, she went a little space
Into the shadow of the circling trees
With wood-knife drawn, and whiles upon her knees
She dropt, and sweeping the sharp knife around,
Took up some scarce-seen thing from off the ground
And thrust it in her bosom, and at last

Into the darkness of the trees she passed.

Meanwhile, the fire burned with clear red flame,
Not wasting ought ; but when again she came
Into its light, within her caught-up gown
Much herbs she had, and on her head a crown
Of dank night-flowering grasses, known to few.

But, casting down the mystic herbs, she drew
From out her wallet a bowl polished bright,
Brazen, and wrought with figures black and white,
Which from the stream she filled with water thin,
And, kneeling by the fire, cast therein
Shreddings of many herbs, and setting it
Amidst the flames, she watched them curl and flit
About the edges of the blackening brass.
But when strange fumes began therefrom to pass,
And clouds of thick white smoke about her flew,
And colourless and dull the fire grew,
Unto her fragrant breast her hand she set,
And drew therefrom a bag of silken fret,
And into her right palm she gently shook
Three grains of something small that had the look
Of millet seeds, then laid the bag once more
On that sweet hidden place it kissed before,
And, lifting up her right hand, murmured low :—

“ O Three-formed, Venerable, dost thou know
That I have left to-night my golden bed
On the sharp pavement of thy wood to shed
Blood from my naked feet, and from mine eyes
Intolerable tears ; to pour forth sighs
In the thick darkness, as with footsteps weak
And trembling knees I prowled about to seek
That which I need forsooth, but fear to find ?
What wouldest thou, my Lady ? art thou blind,
Or sleepest thou, or dost thou, dread one, see
About me somewhat that misliketh thee ?
What crown but thine is on mine unbound hair,
What jewel on my arms, or have I care

Against the flinty windings of thy wood
To guard my feet ? or have I thought it good
To come before thee with unwashen hands ?
“ And this my raiment : Goddess, from three lands
The fleeces it was woven with were brought
Where deeds of thine in ancient days were wrought,
Delos, and Argos, and the Carian mead ;
Nor was it made, O Goddess, with small heed ;
By unshod maidens was the yarn well spun,
And at the moonrise the close web begun,
And finished at the dawning of the light.

“ Nought hides me from the unseen eyes of night
But this alone, what dost thou then to me,
That at my need my flame sinks wretchedly,
And all is vain I do ? Ah, is it so
That to some other helper I must go
Better at need ; wilt thou then take my part
Once more, and pity my divided heart ?
For never was I vowed to thee alone,
Nor didst thou bid me take the tight-drawn zone,
And follow through the twilight of the trees
The glancing limbs of trim-shod huntresses.
Therefore, look down upon me, and see now
These grains of what thou knowest, I will throw
Upon the flame, and then, if at my need
Thou still wilt help me, help ; but if indeed
I am forsaken of thee utterly,
The naked knees of Venus will I try ;
And I may hap ere long to please her well
And one more story they may have to tell
Who in the flowery isle her praises sing.”

So speaking, on the fire did she fling
The unknown grains ; but when the Three-formed heard
From out her trembling lips that impious word,
She granted all her asking, though she knew
What evil road Medea hurried to
She fain had barred against her on that night.

So, now again the fire flamed up bright,
The smoke grew thin, and in the brazen bowl,
Boiling, the mingled herbs did twine and roll,
And with new light Medea's wearied eyes
Gleamed in the fire's shine o'er those mysteries ;
And, taking a green twig from off the ground,
Therewith she stirred the mess, that cast around
A shower of hissing sparks and vapour white,
Sharp to the taste, and 'wilderer to the sight ;
Which when she saw, the vessel off she drew,
As though the ending of her toil she knew,
And cooling for awhile she let it stand,
But at the last therein she laid her hand,
And when she drew it out she thrust the same
Amidst the fire, but neither coal or flame
The tender rosy hand could harm a whit,
Nor was there mark or blemish left on it.

Then did she pour whatso the bowl did hold
Into a fair gemmed phial wrought of gold
She drew out from the wallet, and straightway
Stopping the mouth, in its own place did lay
The well-wrought phial, girding to her side
The wallet that the precious thing did hide ;
Then all the remnants of the herbs she cast
On to the fire, and straight therefrom there passed
A high white flame, and when that sunk, outright
The fire died into the voiceless night.

But toward the river did she turn again,
Not heeding the rough ways or any pain,
But running swiftly came unto her boat,
And in the mid-stream soon was she afloat,
Drawn onward toward the town by flood of tide.

Nor heeded she that by the river side
Still lay her golden shoes, a goodly prize
To some rough fisher in whose sleepy eyes
They first should shine, the while he drew his net
Against the yew wood of the Goddess set.

But she, swept onward by the hurrying stream,
Down in the east beheld a doubtful gleam
That told of dawn ; so bent unto the oar
In terror lest her folk should wake before
Her will was wrought ; nor failed she now to hear
From neighbouring homesteads shrilly notes and clear
Of waking cocks, and twittering from the sedge
Of restless birds about the river's edge ;
And when she drew between the city walls,
She heard the hollow sound of rare footfalls
From men who needs must wake for that or this
While upon sleepers gathered dreams of bliss,
Or great distress at ending of the night,
And grey things coloured with the gathering light.

At last she reached the gilded water-gate,
And though nigh breathless, scarce she dared to wait
To fasten up her shallop to the stone,
Which yet she dared not leave ; so this being done,
Swiftly by passages and stairs she ran,
Trembling and pale, though not yet seen by man,
Until to Jason's chamber door she came.

And there awhile indeed she stayed, for shame
Rose up against her fear ; but mighty love
And the sea-haunting rose-crowned seed of Jove
O'ermastered both ; so trembling, on the pin
She laid her hand, but ere she entered in
She covered up again her shoulder sweet,
And dropped her dusky raiment o'er her feet ;
Then entering the dimly-lighted room,
Where with the lamp dawn struggled, through the gloom,
Seeking the prince she peered, who sleeping lay
Upon his gold bed, and abode the day
Smiling, still clad in arms, and round his sword
His fingers met ; then she, with a soft word,
Drew nigh him, and from out his slackened hand
With slender rosy fingers drew the brand,
Then kneeling, laid her hand upon his breast,

And said : " O Jason, wake up from thy rest,
Perchance from thy last rest, and speak to me."

Then fell his light sleep from him suddenly,
And on one arm he rose, and clenched his hand,
Raising it up, as though it held the brand,
And on this side and that began to stare.

But bringing close to him her visage fair,
She whispered : " Smite not, for thou hast no sword,
Speak not above thy breath, for one loud word
May slay both thee and me. Day grows apace ;
What day thou knowest ! Canst thou see my face ?
Last night thou didst behold it with such eyes,
That I, Medea, wise among the wise,
The safeguard of my father and his land,
Who have been used with steady eyes to stand
In awful groves alone with Hecate,
Henceforth must call myself the bond of thee,
The fool of love ; speak not, but kiss me, then,
Yea, kiss my lips, that not the best of men
Has touched ere thou. Alas, quick comes the day !
Draw back, but hearken what I have to say,
For every moment do I dread to hear
Thy wakened folk, or our folk drawing near ;
Therefore I speak as if with my last breath,
Shameless, beneath the shadowing wings of death,
That still may let us twain again to meet,
And snatch from bitter love the bitter sweet
That some folk gather while they wait to die.

" Alas, I loiter, and the day is nigh !
Soothly I came to bring thee more than this,
The memory of an unasked fruitless kiss
Upon thy death-day, which this day would be
If there were not some little help in me."

Therewith from out her wallet did she draw
The phial, and a crystal without flaw
Shaped like an apple, scored with words about,
Then said : " But now I bid thee have no doubt.
With this oil hidden by these gems and gold

Anoint thine arms and body, and be bold,
Nor fear the fire-breathing bulls one whit,
Such mighty virtue have I drawn to it,
Whereof I give thee proof." Therewith her hand
She thrust into the lamp-flame that did stand
Anigh the bed, and showed it him again
Unscarred by any wound or drawn with pain,
Then said : " Now, when Mars' plain is ploughed at
last

And in the furrows those ill seeds are cast,
Take thou this ball in hand and watch the thing ;
Then shalt thou see a horrid crop upspring
Of all-armed men therefrom to be thy bane,
Were I not here to make their fury vain.
Draw not thy sword against them as they rise,
But cast this ball amid them, and their eyes
Shall serve them then but little to see thee,
And each of others' weapons slain shall be.
" Now will my father hide his rage at heart,
And praise thee much that thou hast played thy part,
And bid thee to a banquet on this night,
And pray thee wait until to-morrow's light
Before thou triest the Temple of the Fleece.
Trust not to him, but see that unto Greece
The ship's prow turns, and all is ready there,
And at the banquet let thy men forbear
The maddening wine, and bid them arm them all
For what upon this night may chance to fall.
" Now will I get by stealth the keys that hold
The seven locks which guard the Fleece of Gold ;
And while we try the fleece, let thy men steal,
How so they may, unto thy ready keel,
Thus art thou saved alive with thy desire.
" But what thing will be left to me but fire ?
The fire of fierce despair within my heart,
The while I reap my guerdon for my part,
Curses and torments, and in no long space
Real fire of pine-wood in some rocky place,

Wreathing around my body greedily,
A dreadful beacon o'er the leaden sea."

But Jason drew her to him, and he said :—
"Nay, by these tender hands and golden head,
That saving things for me have wrought to-night,
I know not what ; by this unseen delight
Of thy fair body, may I rather burn,
Nor may the flame die ever if I turn
Back to my hollow ship, and leave thee here,
Who in one hour art become so dear,
Thy limbs so longed for, that at last I know
Why men have been content to suffer woe
Past telling, if the Gods but granted this,
A little while such lips as thine to kiss,
A little while to drink such deep delight.

"What wouldst thou? Wilt thou go from me? The
light

Is grey and tender yet, and in your land
Surely the twilight, lingering long, doth stand
'Twixt dawn and day."

"O Prince," she said, "I came
To save your life. I cast off fear and shame
A little while, but fear and shame are here.
The hand thou holdest trembles with my fear,
With shame my cheeks are burning, and the sound
Of mine own voice : but ere this hour comes round,
We twain will be betwixt the dashing oars,
The ship still making for the Grecian shores.
Farewell, till then, though in the lists to-day
Thyself shalt see me, watching out the play."

Therewith she drew off from him, and was gone,
And in the chamber Jason left alone,
Praising the heavenly one, the Queen of Jove,
Pondered upon this unasked gift of love,
And all the changing wonder of his life.

But soon he rose to fit him for the strife,

And ere the sun his orb began to lift
O'er the dark hills, with fair Medea's gift
His arms and body he anointed well,
And round about his neck he hung the spell
Against the earth-born, the fair crystal ball
Laid in a purse, and then from wall to wall,
Athwart the chamber paced full eagerly,
Expecting when the fateful time should be.

Meanwhile, Medea coming to her room
Unseen, lit up the slowly parting gloom
With scented torches : then bound up her hair,
And stripped the dark gown from her body fair,
And laid it with the brass bowl in a chest,
Where many a day it had been wont to rest,
Brazen and bound with iron, and whose key
No eye but hers had ever happed to see.

Then wearied, on her bed she cast her down,
And strove to think ; but soon the uneasy frown
Faded from off her brow, her lips closed tight
But now, just parted, and her fingers white
Slackened their hold upon the coverlet,
And o'er her face faint smiles began to flit,
As o'er the summer pool the faint soft air :
So instant and so kind the God was there.

The Eighth Book tells how Jason, acting upon the advice of Medea, tamed the Brazen Bulls, and of the destruction of the Earth-born warriors. But though he has fulfilled the conditions, Æetes is unwilling to give up the Fleece, for he was plotting to burn the ship Argo and kill the Argonauts. But Medea comes to the rescue, as told in the following extract from the Eighth Book.

But on that eve, with manifold delight,
Æetes feasted them in his fair hall ;
But they, well knowing what might chance to fall,
Sat saying little, nor drank deep of wine ;
Until at last the old king gave the sign

To break the feast up, and within a while
All seemed asleep throughout the mighty pile.

All seemed asleep, but now Medea went
With beating heart to work out her intent,
Scarce doubtful of the end, since only two
In all the world, she and Æetes, knew
Where the keys were, far from the light of day,
Beneath the palace. So, in garments grey,
Like the soft creeping twilight did she go,
Until she reached a passage far below
The river, past whose oozing walls of stone
She and the king alone had ever gone.

Now she, who thus far had come through the dark,
Stopped, and in haste striking a little spark
From something in her hand, lit up a lamp,
Whose light fell on an iron door, with damp
All rusted red, which with a key of brass
She opened, and there through made haste to pass,
Shuddering a little, as her feet 'gan tread
Upon a dank cold floor, though overhead.
High-arched the place was, fairly built enow.

But she across the slippery floor did go
Unto the other wall, wherein was built
A little aumbrye, with a door o'er-gilt,
That with the story of King Athamas,
And Phryxus, and the ram all carven was.
There did she draw forth from her balmy breast
A yellow flowering herb, that straight she pressed
Upon the lock, low muttering the while ;
But soon across her face there passed a smile,
As backward in the lock the bolts did turn,
And the door opened ; then a golden urn
She saw within the aumbrye, whereon she
Drew out the thing she sought for eagerly,
The seven keys with sere-cloth done about.
Then through the dreary door did she pass out,
And made it fast, and went her way once more
Through the black darkness on from floor to floor.

And so, being come to Jason, him she found
 All armed, and ready ; therefore, with no sound,
 She beckoned him to follow, and the twain
 Passed through the brazen doors, locked all in vain,
 Such virtue had the herb Medea bore,
 And passing, did they leave ajar each door,
 To give more ease unto the Minyæ.

So out into the fresh night silently
 The lovers passed, the loveliest of the land ;
 But as they went, neither did hand touch hand,
 Or face seek face ; for, gladsome as they were,
 Trembling with joy to be at last so near
 The wished-for day, some God yet seemed to be
 'Twixt the hard past and their felicity.

BOOK IX

BUT when they reached the precinct of the God,
 And on the hallowed turf their feet now trod,
 Medea turned to Jason, and she said :—
 " O love, turn round, and note the goodlihead
 My father's palace shows beneath the stars.
 Bethink thee of the men grown old in wars,
 Who do my bidding ; what delights I have,
 How many ladies lie in wait to save
 My life from toil and carefulness, and think
 How sweet a cup I have been used to drink,
 And how I cast it to the ground for thee.
 Upon the day thou weariest of me,
 I wish that thou mayst somewhat think of this,
 And 'twixt thy new-found kisses, and the bliss
 Of something sweeter than thine old delight,
 Remember thee a little of this night
 Of marvels, and this starlit, silent place,
 And these two lovers standing face to face."

"O love," he said, "by what thing shall I swear,
That while I live thou shalt not be less dear
Than thou art now?"

"Nay, sweet," she said, "let be;
Wert thou more fickle than the restless sea,
Still should I love thee, knowing thee for such;
Whom I know not, indeed, but fear the touch
Of Fortune's hand when she beholds our bliss,
And knows that nought is good to me but this.

"But now be ready, for I long full sore
To hear the merry dashing of the oar,
And feel the freshness of the following breeze
That sets me free, and sniff the rough salt seas.
Look! yonder thou mayst see armed shadows steal
Down to the quays, the guiders of thy keel;
Now follow me, though little shalt thou do
To gain this thing, if Hecate be true
Unto her servant. Nay, draw not thy sword,
And, for thy life, speak not a single word
Until I bid thee, else may all be lost,
And of this game our lives yet pay the cost."

Then toward the brazen temple-door she went,
Wherefrom, half-open, a faint gleam was sent;
For little need of lock it had forsooth,
Because its sleepless guardian knew no ruth,
And had no lust for precious things or gold,
Whom, drawing near, Jason could now behold,
As back Medea thrust the heavy door,
For prone he lay upon the gleaming floor,
Not moving, though his restless, glittering eyes
Gave unto them no least hope of surprise.
Hideous he was, where all things else were fair;
Dull-skinned, foul-spotted, with lank rusty hair
About his neck; and hooked yellow claws
Just showed from 'neath his belly and huge jaws,
Closed in the hideous semblance of a smile.
Then Jason shuddered, wondering with what wile

That fair king's daughter such a beast could tame,
And of his sheathed sword had but little shame.

But being within the doors, both mantle grey
And heavy gown Medea cast away,
And in thin clinging silk alone was clad,
And round her neck a golden chain she had,
Where to was hung a harp of silver white.
Then the great dragon, at that glittering sight,
Raised himself up upon his loathly feet,
As if to meet her, while her fingers sweet
Already moved amongst the golden strings,
Preluding nameless and delicious things ;
But now she beckoned Jason to her side,
For slowly towards them 'gan the beast to glide,
And when close to his love the hero came,
She whispered breathlessly : " On me the blame
If here we perish ; if I give the word,
Then know that all is lost, and draw thy sword,
And manlike die in battle with the beast ;
So dying shalt thou fail to see at least
This body thou desiredst so to see,
In thy despite here mangled wretchedly.
Peace, for he cometh, O thou Goddess bright,
What help wilt thou be unto me this night ? "

So murmured she, while ceaselessly she drew
Her fingers through the strings, and fuller grew
The tinkling music, but the beast drawn nigh
Went slower still, and turning presently
Began to move around them in a ring.
And as he went, there fell a strange rattling
Of his dry scales ; but as he turned, she turned,
Nor failed to meet the eyes that on her burned
With steadfast eyes, and, lastly, clear and strong
Her voice broke forth in sweet melodious song :—

" O evil thing, what brought thee here
To be a wonder and a fear
Unto the river-haunting folk ?

Was it the God of Day that broke
The shadow of thy windless trees,
Gleaming from golden palaces,
And shod with light, and armed with light,
Made thy slime stone, and day thy night,
And drove thee forth unwillingly
Within his golden house to lie?

"Or was it the slim messenger,
Who, treading softly, free from fear,
Beguiled thee with his smiling face
From out thy dim abiding place,
To follow him and set thee down
Midst of this twice-washed royal town?

"Or, was it rather the dread Lord
Who slayeth without spear or sword,
And with the flower-culling maid
Of Enna, dwelleth in the shade,
Who, with stern voice compelling thee,
Hath set thee here, our bane to be?

"Or was it Venus, seeking far
A sleepless guard 'gainst grief and war,
Who, journeying through thy dismal land,
Beside the heavy lake did stand,
And with no word, but very sight
Of tender limbs and bosom white,
Drew forth thy scaly feet and hard,
To follow over rock and shard?

"Or rather, thy dull, waveless lake
Didst thou not leave for her dread sake,
Who, passing swift from glade to glade,
The forest-dwellers makes afraid
With shimmering of her silver bow
And dreadful arrows? Even so
I bid thee now to yield to me,
Her maid, who overmastered thee,
The three-formed dreadful one who reigns
In heaven and the fiery plains,
But on the green earth best of all.

“ Lo, now thine upraised crest let fall,
Relax thy limbs, let both thine eyes
Be closed, and bestial fantasies
Fill thy dull head till dawn of day
And we are far upon our way.”

As thus she sung the beast seemed not to hear
Her words at first, but ever drew anear,
Circling about them, and Medea's face
Grew pale unto the lips, though still the place
Rung with the piercing sweetness of her song ;
But slower soon he dragged his length along,
And on his limbs he tottered, till at last
All feebly by the wondering prince he passed,
And whining to Medea's feet he crept,
With eyes half closed, as though well-nigh he slept,
And there before her laid his head adown ;
Who, shuddering, on his wrinkled neck and brown
Set her white foot, and whispered : “ Haste, O love !
Behold the keys ; haste ! while the Gods above
Are friendly to us ; there behold the shrine
Where thou canst see the lamp of silver shine.
Nay, draw not death upon both thee and me
With fearless kisses ; fear, until the sea
Shall fold green arms about us lovingly,
And kindly Venus to thy keel be nigh.”

Then lightly from her soft side Jason stept,
While still upon the beast her foot she kept,
Still murmuring softly many an unknown word,
As when through half-shut casements the brown bird
We hearken when the night is come in June,
And thick-leaved woods are 'twixt us and his tune.

But Jason, going swiftly with good heart,
Came to the wished-for shrine built all apart
Midmost the temple, that on pillars stood
Of jasper green, and marble red as blood,
All white itself and carven cunningly

With Neptune bringing from the wavy sea
The golden shining ram to Athamas ;
And the first door thereof of silver was,
Wrought over with a golden glittering sun
That seemed well-nigh alike the heavenly one,
Such art therein the cunningest of men
Had used, which little Jason heeded then,
But thrusting in the lock the smallest key
Of those he bore, it opened easily ;
And then five others, neither wrought of gold,
Or carved with tales, or lovely to behold,
He opened ; but before the last one stayed
His hand, wherein the heavy key he weighed,
And pondering, in low muttered words he said :—
“ The prize is reached, which yet I somewhat dread
To draw unto me ; since I know indeed,
That henceforth war and toil shall be my meed.—
Too late to fear, it was too late, the hour
I left the grey cliffs and the beechen bower,
So here I take hard life and deathless praise,
Who once desired nought but quiet days,
And painless life, not empty of delight ;
I, who shall now be quickener of the fight,
Named by a great name—a far-babbled name,
The ceaseless seeker after praise and fame.
“ May all be well, and on the noisy ways
Still may I find some wealth of happy days.”
Therewith he threw the last door open wide,
Whose hammered iron did the marvel hide,
And shut his dazzled eyes, and stretched his hands
Out toward the sea-born wonder of all lands,
And buried them deep in the locks of gold,
Grasping the fleece within his mighty hold.

Which when Medea saw, her gown of grey
She caught up from the ground, and drew away
Her wearied foot from off the rugged beast,
And while from her soft strain she never ceased,

In the dull folds she hid her silk from sight,
And then, as bending 'neath the burden bright,
Jason drew nigh, joyful, yet still afraid,
She met him, and her wide grey mantle laid
Over the fleece, whispering : " Make no delay ;
He sleeps, who never slept by night or day
Till now ; nor will his charmed sleep be long.
Light-foot am I, and sure thine arms are strong ;
Haste, then ! No word ! nor turn about to gaze
At me, as he who in the shadowy ways
Turned round to see once more the twice-lost face."

Then swiftly did they leave the dreadful place,
Turning no look behind, and reached the street,
That with familiar look and kind did greet
Those wanderers, mazed with marvels and with fear.
And so, unchallenged, did they draw anear
The long white quays, and at the street's end now
Beheld the ships' masts standing row by row
Stark black against the stars : then cautiously
Peered Jason forth, ere they took heart to try
The open starlit place ; but nought he saw
Except the night-wind twitching the loose straw
From half-unloaded keels, and nought he heard
But the strange twittering of a caged green bird
Within an Indian ship, and from the hill
A distant baying : yea, all was so still,
Somewhat they doubted, nathless forth they passed,
And Argo's painted sides they reached at last.
On whom down-looking, scarce more noise they heard
Than from the other ships ; some muttered word,
Some creaking of the timbers, as the tide
Ran gurgling seaward past her shielded side.
Then Jason knelt, and whispered : " Wise ye be,
O fair companions on the pathless sea,
But come, Erginus, Nestor, and ye twain
Of Lacedæmon, to behold my gain ;
Take me amongst you, neither be afraid

To take withal this gold, and this fair maid.
Yare !—for the ebb runs strongly towards the sea,
The east wind drives the rack to Thessaly,
And lightly do such kings as this one sleep
If now and then small watch their servants keep. '

Then saw Medea men like shadows grey,
Rise from the darksome decks, who took straightway
With murmured joy, from Jason's outstretched hands,
The conquered fleece, the wonder of all lands,
While with strong arms he took the royal maid,
And in their hold the precious burthen laid,
And scarce her dainty feet could touch the deck,
Ere down he leapt, and little now did reck
That loudly clanged his armour therewithal.

But, turning townward, did Medea call :—
" O noble Jason, and ye heroes strong,
To sea, to sea ! nor pray ye loiter long ;
For surely shall ye see the beacons flare
Ere in mid stream ye are, and running fair
On toward the sea with tide, and oar, and sail.
My father wakes, nor bides he to bewail
His loss and me ; I see his turret gleam
As he goes towards the beacon, and down stream
Absyrtus lurks before the sandy bar
In mighty keel well manned and dight for war."

But as she spoke, rattling the cable slipped
From out the hawse-hole, and the long oars dipped
As from the quays the heroes pushed away,
And in the loosened sail the wind 'gan play ;
But e'en as they unto the stroke leaned back,
And Nauplius, catching at the main-sheet slack
Had drawn it taut, out flared the beacon wide,
Lighting the waves, and they heard folk who cried :
" Awake, awake, awake, O Colchian folk ! "
And all about the blare of horns outbroke,
As watch-tower answered watch-tower down the stream,
Where far below they saw the bale-fires gleam ;

And galloping of horses now they heard,
And clang of arms, and cries of men afeared,
For now the merchant mariners who lay
About the town, thought surely an ill day
Had dawned upon them while they slept at ease,
And, half awake, pushed madly from the quays
With crash of breaking oars and meeting ships,
And cries and curses from outlandish lips ;
So fell the quiet night to turmoil sore,
While in the towers, over the uproar,
Melodiously the bells began to ring.

But Argo, leaping forward to the swing
Of measured oars, and leaning to the breeze,
Sped swiftly 'twixt the dark and whispering trees ;
Nor longer now the heroes silence kept,
So joyously their hearts within them leapt,
But loud they shouted, seeing the gold fell
Laid heaped before them, and longed sore to tell
Their fair adventure to the maids of Greece ;
And as the mingled noises did decrease
With added distance, and behind them night
Grew wan with coming of the eastern light,
Across the strings his fingers Orpheus drew,
And through the woods his winged music flew :—

“ O surely, now the fisherman
Draws homeward through the water wan
Across the bay we know so well,
And in the sheltered chalky dell
The shepherd stirs ; and now afield
They drive the team with white wand peeled,
Muttering across the barley-bread
At daily toil and dreary-head.

“ And 'midst them all, perchance, my love
Is waking, and doth gently move
And stretch her soft arms out to me,
Forgetting thousand leagues of sea ;

And now her body I behold,
Unhidden but by hair of gold,
And now the silver water kiss,
The crown of all delight and bliss.
And now I see her bind her hair
And do upon her raiment fair,
And now before the altar stand,
With incense in her outstretched hand,
To supplicate the Gods for me ;
Ah, one day landing from the sea,
Amid the maidens shall I hear
Her voice in praise, and see her near,
Holding the gold-wrapt laurel crown,
'Midst of the shouting, wondering town ! "

So sung he joyously, nor knew that they
Must wander yet for many an evil day
Or ever the dread Gods should let them come
Back to the white walls of their long-left home.
But on the shouting heroes gazed adown
The foundress of their triumph and renown,
And to her lover's side still drew anear,
With heart now swelled with joy, now sick with fear,
And cheeks now flushed with love, now pale and wan,
As now she thought upon that goodly man,
And now on the uncertain, dreadful Gods,
And now upon her father, and the odds
He well might raise against the reckless crew,
For all his mighty power well she knew ;
And at that thought well might her heart grow
cold,
And well might she her wretched self behold,
Led helpless through some old familiar place,
With none to turn on her a pitying face,
Unto the death in life, she still might win ;
And yet, if she should 'scape the meed of sin
This once, the world was fair and bright enough,
And love there was to lead her o'er the rough

Of life, and love to crown her head with flowers,
And fill her days and nights with happy hours.

Now swift beneath the oar-strokes Argo flew,
While the sun rose behind them, and they drew
Unto the river's mouth, nor failed to see
Absyrtus' galley waiting watchfully
Betwixt them and the white-topped turbid bar.
Therefore they gat them ready now for war,
With joyful heart, for sharp they sniffed to sea,
And saw the great waves tumbling green and free
Outside the bar upon the way to Greece,
The rough green way to glory and sweet peace.

Then to the prow gat Jason, and the maid
Must needs be with him, though right sore afraid,
As nearing now the Colchian ship, they hung
On balanced oars ; but the wild Arcas strung
His deadly bow, and clomb into the top.

Then Jason cried : " Absyrtus, will ye stop
Our peaceful keel, or let us take the sea ?
Soothly, have we no will to fight with thee
If we may pass unfoughten, therefore say,
What is it thou wilt have this dawn of day ? "

Now on the other prow Absyrtus stood,
His visage red with eager wrathful blood,
And in his right hand shook a mighty spear,
And said : " O seafarers, ye pass not here,
For gifts or prayers, but if it must be so,
Over our sunken bulwarks shall ye go ;
Nor ask me why, for thus my father wills,
Yet, as I now behold you, my heart thrills
With wrath indeed ; and hearken for what cause,
That ye against all friendship and good laws
Bear off my sister with you ; wherefore now
Mars give you courage and a brazen brow !
That ye may try this dangerous pass in vain,
For soothly, of your slaughter am I fain."

Then Jason wrathfully threw up his head,

But ere the shout came, fair Medea said,
In trembling whisper thrilling through his ear :—
“ Haste, quick upon them ! if before is fear,
Behind is death ! ” Then Jason turning, saw
A tall ship staggering with the gusty flaw,
Just entering the long reach where they were,
And heard her horns through the fresh morning air.
Then lifted he his hand, and with a cry
Back flew the balanced oars full orderly,
And toward the doomed ship mighty Argo passed ;
Thereon Absyrtus shouted loud, and cast
His spear at Jason, that before his feet
Stuck in the deck ; then out the arrows fleet
Burst from the Colchians ; and scarce did they spare
Medea’s trembling side and bosom fair ;
But Jason, roaring as the lioness
When round her helpless whelps the hunters press,
Whirled round his head his mighty brass-bound spear,
That flying, smote the prince beneath the ear,
As Arcas’ arrow sunk into his side.
Then falling, scarce he met the rushing tide,
Ere Argo’s mighty prow had thrust apart
The huddled oars, and through the fair ship’s heart
Had thrust her iron beak, then the green wave
Rushed in as rush the waters through a cave
That tunnels half a sea-girt lonely rock.
Then drawing swiftly backward from the shock,
And heeding not the cries of fear and woe,
They left the waters dealing with their foe ;
And at the following ship threw back a shout,
And seaward o’er the bar drave Argo out.
Then joyful felt all men as now at last
From hill to green hill of the sea they passed ;
But chiefly joyed Medea, as now grew
The Colchian hills behind them faint and blue,
And like a white speck showed the following ship.
There ’neath the canopy, lip pressed to lip,
They sat and told their love, till scarce he thought

What precious burden back to Greece he brought
Besides the maid, nor for his kingdom cared,
As on her beauty with wet eyes he stared,
And heard her sweet voice soft as in a dream,
When all seems gained, and trouble dead does seem,
And on his face her red lips he could feel,
And round her panting side his fingers steal.

So passed this day, and she no less forgot
That wreck upon the bar, the evil spot,
Red with a brother's blood, where long was stayed
The wrathful king as from the stream he weighed
The bleeding body of his well-loved son.

Lo in such wise their journey was begun,
And so began short love and long decay,
Sorrow that bides and joy that fleets away.

Books X to XII tell of the homeward voyage of the Argo, how in one place the ship was drawn overland and the heroes spent a winter by a northern river, reached the northern sea, and passed through unknown lands and seas till they came to the Pillars of Hercules.

BOOK XIII

BUT as along the shore they sailed next day,
Full many a headland on their lucky way
Erginus knew, but said no towns there were
Within that land, but that from year to year
Well-nigh untilled the earth her produce gave,
And many a herd the houseless people drave,
And using neither roof nor sheltering wall,
Dwelt but in tents, and had no want at all.

With that he bade them trim the bellying sail,
For from the land now blew a gentle gale,
Spice-laden, warm, that made their full hearts yearn
For unseen things, but soon they left astern
That fruitful place, the lion-haunted land,
Nor saw but tumbling seas on either hand.

Three days they sailed, and passed on the third day
A rock-bound coast upon their left that lay,
But on the morrow eve made land again,
Stretched right ahead across the watery plain,
Whereto ere nightfall did they draw anear,
And so lay-to till dawn with little fear ;
For from the shore a light, soft land-wind blew.
But as the dead night round about them drew,
The ceaseless roar of savage beasts they heard,
Mingled with sounds like cries of men afeard,
And blare of horns, and clank of heavy chains,
And noise of bells, such as in moonlit lanes
Rings from the grey team on the market-night.
And with these noises did they see a light,
That seemed to light some crown of palaces,
Shining from out a grove of thickset trees.
Then did the Minyæ doubt if they were come
Unto some great king's well-adorned home,
Or if some temple of a God were there,
Or if, indeed, the spirits of the air
Haunted that place : so slowly passed away
The sleepless night, and at the dawn of day
Their longing eyes beheld a lovely land,
Green meadows rising o'er a yellow strand,
Well-set with fair fruit-bearing trees, and groves
Of thick-leaved elms, all populous of doves,
And watered by a wandering clear green stream ;
And through the trees they saw a palace gleam
Of polished marble, fair beyond man's thought.
There as they lay, the sweetest scents were brought
By sighing winds across the bitter sea,
And languid music breathed melodiously,
Steeping their souls in such unmixed delight,
Their hearts were melted, and all dim of sight
They grew, and scarce their hands could grip the oar,
And as they slowly neared the happy shore,
The young men well-nigh wept, and e'en the wise
Thought they had reached the gate of Paradise.

But 'midst them stood Medea, and thoughtfully
Gazed landward o'er the ripple of the sea,
And said no word, till from her precious things
She drew a casket full of chains and rings,
And took therefrom a chaplet brown and sere,
And set it on her head : and now being near
The yellow strand, high on the poop she stood,
And said : " O heroes, what has chilled your blood,
That in such wise ye gaze upon this land
With tearful eye, and nerveless, languid hand,
And heaving breast, and measureless desire ?
Be wise, for here the never-dying fire,
The God-begotten wonder, Circe, lights,
The wise of women, framer of delights
That being of man once felt, he ne'er shall cease
To long for vainly, as the years increase
On his dulled soul, shut in some bestial form.

" And good it had been that some bitter storm
Were tossing Argo's planks from sea to sea,
Than ye had reached this fair land, but for me,
Who amid tears and prayers, and nameless pain,
Some little wisdom have made shift to gain :
Look forth upon the green shore, and behold
Those many beasts, all collared with fine gold,
Lions and pards, and small-eyed restless bears,
And tusked boars, who from uneasy lairs
Are just come forth ; nor is there 'mongst them one
But once walked upright underneath the sun,
And had the name of man : such shall ye be,
If from the ship ye wander heedlessly,
But safely I my kinswoman may meet,
And learn from her the bitter and the sweet
That waits us ere ye come to Greece again,
And see the wind-swept green Thessalian plain.
" Meanwhile, let nothing tempt you to the land,
Nor unto anything stretch forth the hand
That comes from shore, for all ye may see there
Are but lost men and their undoers fair."

But with that word they furrowed the wet sand,
And straight they ran the gangway out to land,
O'er which, with girded raiment, passed the queen ;
But now another marvel was there seen,
For to the shore, from many a glade and lawn,
The golden-collared sad-eyed beasts were drawn
In close-set ranks above the sea-beat shore,
And open-mouthed, with varying moan and roar,
White-foot Medea did they seem to threat ;
Whereat the Minyæ on their bow-strings set
The notches of their arrows, but the maid
Turned round about, with calm face unafraid,
And said : " O Minyæ, lay your weapons down,
Nor fear for me ; behold this chaplet brown,
Whose withered leaves rest lightly on my head,
This is the herb that Gods and mortals dread,
The Pontic Moly, the unchanging charm."

Then up the beach she passed, and her white arm
This way and that the leopards thrust aside,
And 'mid the grisly swine her limbs did glide,
And on a lion's mane her hand she laid ;
But still with moans they thronged about the maid,
As she passed onward to the palace white,
Until the elm-groves hid her from the sight.

Then they with fearful hearts did sacrifice
Unto the Gods in their seafaring wise,
But of the lovely land were they so fain
That their return they scarcely counted gain,
Unto the green plain dotted o'er with folds
And that fair bay that Pelion beholds.

Meanwhile Medea through the thick-leaved grove
Passed underneath the moaning of the dove,
Not left by those strange beasts ; until at last
Her feet from off the sparse long grasses passed
Unto a sunny space of daisied sward,
From which a strange-wrought silver grate did guard
A lovely pleasance, set with flowers, foursquare,

On three sides ending in a cloister fair
That hid the fair feet of a marble house,
Carved thick with flowers and stories amorous.
And midmost of the slender garden trees
A gilded shrine stood, set with images,
Wherefrom the never-dying fire rose up
Into the sky, and a great jewelled cup
Ran over ever from a runlet red
Of fragrant wine, that 'mid the flowers shed
Strange scent that grapes yield not to any man,
While round about the shrine four streamlets ran
From golden founts to freshen that green place.

So there Medea stayed a little space,
Gazing in wonder through the silver rail
That fenced that garden from the wooded vale ;
For damsels wandered there in languid wise
As though they wearied of that Paradise,
Their jewelled raiment dragging from its stalk
The harmless daisy in their listless walk.
But though from rosy heel to golden head
Most fair they were and wrought with white and red,
Like to the casket-bearer who beguiled
The hapless one, and though their lips still smiled,
Yet to the Colchian, heavy-eyed they seemed,
And each at other gazed as though she dreamed ;
Not noting ought of all the glorious show
She joined herself, nor seeming more to know
What words she spoke nor what her fellows sung,
Nor feeling arms that haply round her clung.

For here and there the Colchian maid could see
Some browned seafarer kissing eagerly
White feet or half-bared bosom, and could hear
A rough voice stammering 'twixt love and fear
Amid the dreamy murmur of the place,
As on his knees, with eager upturned face,
Some man would pour forth many a fruitless word,
That did but sound like song of a wild bird
Unto his love ; while she for all reply,

Still gazing on his flushed face wearily,
Would undo clasp and belt, and show to him
Undreamed-of loveliness of side or limb.

And in such guise of half-stripped jewelled weed,
The men entrapped, Medea saw them lead
Into the dark cool cloister, whence again
They came not forth, but four-foot, rough of mane,
Uncouth with spots and dangerous of claw.

But when the sad-eyed beasts about her saw
These draw towards them and beheld the gate
Open and shut, and fellows to that state
New come, they whined, and brushing round her feet
Prayed for return unto that garden sweet,
Their own undoing once, that yet shall be
Death unto many a toiler of the sea,
Because all these outside the silver grate
Were men indeed though inarticulate,
And, spite of seeming, in none otherwise,
Did longing torture them, than when in guise
Of men they stood before that garden green,
And first their eyes the baneful place had seen.

But now the queen grew wrath, for in her way,
Before the gate a yellow lion lay,
A tiger-cat her raiment brushed aside,
And o'er her feet she felt a serpent glide,
The swine screamed loud about her, and a pard
Her shining shoulder of her raiment bared
With light swift clutch ; then she from off her head
Took the sere moly wreath, and therewith said :—
“ What do ye, wretches, know ye not this sign.
That whoso wears is as a thing divine ?
Get from this place, for never more can ye
Become partakers of the majesty
That from man's soul looks through his eager eyes.
Go—wail that ever ye were made so wise
As men are made ; who chase through smooth and rough
Their own undoing, nor can have enough
Of bitter trouble and entangling woe.”

Then slowly from her did those monsters go,
In varied voices mourning for their lot
And that sweet poison ne'er to be forgot.

But straight with serious face the Colchian maid
Her slender fingers on the latchet laid
That held the silver gate, and entered in ;
Nor did those weary images of sin
Take any heed of her as she passed by,
But, if they met her eyes, stared listlessly,
Like those who walk in sleep, and as they dream
Turn empty faces to the lightning's gleam,
And murmur softly while the thunder rolls.

Swiftly she passed those bodies void of souls,
And through the darkling corridor she passed,
And reached a huge adorned hall at last,
Where sat alone the deathless sorceress,
Upon whose knees an open book did press,
Wherein strange things the Gods knew not, she read ;
A golden vine-bough wreathed her golden head,
And her fair body a thin robe did touch
With silken folds, but hid it not so much
As the cool ripple hides Diana's feet,
When through the brook the roe-deer, slim and fleet,
She follows at the dawning of the day.

Smiling, she put the wondrous book away
As the light footsteps fell upon her ear,
She raised her head, and when the queen drew near
She said : " O wanderer from sea to sea,
I greet thee well, and dear thou art to me ;
Though verily if I could wish for ought,
I could have wished thou hadst been hither brought
Ere that had happed to thee that haps to all,
Into the troublous sea of love to fall,
Then like unto the gods shouldst thou have been,
Nor ever died, but sitting here have seen
The fashion of the foolish world go by,
And drunk the cup of power and majesty.

“ But now it may not be, and thou must come
With him thou boughtedst, to a troublous home ;
But since indeed the fates will have it so,
Take heed thou dost the things I bid thee do.
And, first, since thou wouldst have me purify
Your hands of his blood that thou sawest die
’Twixt yellow Phasis and the green-ridged sea,
Behold, this is not possible to me,
Nor ever must another altar stand
In this green nook of the Italian land,
To ought but me, no, not unto my Sire ;
But unto him shall ye light ruddy fire,
When, drawing nigh to your desired home,
Unto the headland of Malea ye come ;
And then, indeed, I bid you not to spare
Spices and golden things and raiment fair,
But to the country folk give things of price,
And from them take wherewith to sacrifice,
A hundred milk-white bulls, a hundred kine,
And many a jar of unmixed honied wine,
And, crowned with olive, round the altars sing
Unto the God who gladdens everything,
Thy father’s father, the all-seeing Sun.
And then the deed thy Jason’s spear has done
Mayst thou forget, it shall not visit thee.
Moreover, sailing hence across the sea,
A waste of yellow sand shall ye pass by
’Neath the Trinacrian cliffs, whereon shall lie
Fair women, fairer than thine eyes have seen.
And if thou still wouldst be a Grecian queen,
When to that deadly place ye draw anear,
And sweetest music ye begin to hear,
Bid your bold love steer Argo from the land,
While Thracian Orpheus takes his harp in hand,
And sings thereto some God-delighting strain.
And surely else shall all your toil be vain,
For deadlier than my gardens are those sands ;
And when the mariner’s toil-hardened hands

Reach out unto those bodies fair and white,
They clasp but death instead of their delight.

“ But, doing as I bid, Malea reach,
And after, nigh Iolchos Argo beach,
Yet at the city haste ye not to land,
For still the sceptre presses Pelias' hand,
And Æson is at rest for evermore ;
Bid then thy folk lurk by some wooded shore,
And to the white-walled city straightly wend
Thyself alone, and safely there make end
Of the King's life ; nor need I teach thee how,
For deep unfailing wiles thy soul doth know.

“ What more ? what more ? I see thy grey eyes ask,
What course, what ending to the tangled task
The Gods have set before me, ere I die ?
O child, I know all things, indeed, but why
Shouldst thou know all, nor yet be wise therefore,
Me knowledge grieves not, thee should it grieve sore,
Nor knowing, shouldst thou cease to hope or fear.
What ! do men think of death ere it draws near ?
Not so, else surely would they stint their strife,
For lengthening out their little span of life,
But where each found himself there should he sit,
Not moving hand or foot for thought of it.
Wherefore the Gods, wishing the earth to teem
With living wills like theirs, nor as a dream
To hold but beauty and the lives of beasts,
That they may have fair stories for their feasts,
Have given them forgetfulness of death,
Longings and hopes, and joy in drawing breath,
And they live happy, knowing nought at all,
Nor what death is, where that shall chance to fall.
For while he lives, few minutes certainly
Does any man believe that he shall die.
Ah, what ? thou hang'st thine head, and on thy feet
Down rain the tears from thy grey eyes and sweet ;
Weep not, nor pity thine own life too much :
Not painless shall it be, indeed, or such

As the Gods live in their unchanged abode,
And yet not joyless ; no unmeasured load
Of sorrows shall thy dull soul learn to bear,
With nought to keep thee back from death but fear,
Of what thou know'st not, knowing nought but pain.
" But though full oft thou shalt lift hands in vain,
Crying to what thou know'st not in thy need,
And blind with agony, yet oft, indeed,
Shalt thou go nigh to think thyself divine,
For love of what thou deemest to be thine,
For joy of what thou dreamest cannot die.

" Live then thy life, nor ask for misery,
Most certain if thou knewest what must be,
And then, at least, this shall not hap to thee,
To be like those who people my sad groves,
Beneath the moaning of the grey-winged doves.
And midst all pain and joy, and wrong and right,
Thy name to all shall be a dear delight
While the world lasts, if this avail thee ought.

" Farewell, O child, whose feet alone have brought
An earthly damsel to my house of gold,
For surely those thou didst erewhile behold
These hands have made, and can unmake again,
Nor know they ought of love, or fear, or pain.
Go, loiter not, this place befits thee nought,
Thou knowest many things full dearly bought,
And well I love thee, being so wise and fair,
But what is knowledge in this deadly air,
That floats about thee, poisoning hearts of man.
Behold I see thy cheeks, that erst were wan,
Flaming with new desire, and in thine eyes
Shine out new thoughts that from thine heart arise ;
Gird up thy raiment, nor run slower now
Than from the amorous bearer of the bow
Once Daphne ran ; nor yet forget the word
That thou from deadly lips this day hast heard."

So said she, and thereat the Colchian maid
Turned from her fair face shuddering and afraid,
With beating heart, and flushed face like the rose
That in the garden of Damascus grows,
And catching up her raiment, hurried through
The mighty hall, where thick the pillars blue
Stood like a dream to hold the roof aloft ;
But as she left it, musky odours soft
Were cast about her by the dallying breeze,
That 'twixt the heavy-fruited garden-trees
Blew o'er those golden heads and bodies white,
And limbs well made for manifold delight,
From 'twixt whose fingers and the strings, did flow
Sweet music such as Helicon might know.

But dizzied, hurrying through the place she past,
Nor any look upon their beauty cast,
Nor any thought unto the music gave,
But set herself her own vext soul to save
From that dread place ; beginning now to run
Like to a damsel of the light-foot One,
Who oft from twilight unto twilight goes
Through still dark woods, where never rough wind blows.

So, the grove passed, she made good speed to reach
The edges of the sea, the wind-swept beach ;
But as she ran, afar the heroes saw
Her raiment fluttering, and made haste to draw
Their two-edged swords, and their strong bows to string,
Doubting that she was chased of some dread thing ;
And Jason leapt ashore, and toward her ran,
And with him went the arrow-loving man,
The wise Arcadian, and the Minyæ
Got ready shielded Argo for the sea.

But ere these met her, with uplifted hand,
She cried : " Turn back, nor deeper in this land
Thrust ye your souls ; nought chases me but fear,
And all is well if on the sea we were ;
Yea, if we once were free from fear and spell,
Then, truly, better were all things than well."

Thereat they stayed, but onward still she ran
Until she reached them, and the godlike man
Took by the arm, and hurrying him along,
Stayed not until their feet were set among
The last faint ripples of the gentle sea,
Wherefrom they boarded Argo speedily,
And Jason bid all men unto the oar.

With that they left the fair death-bearing shore,
Not gladlier than some fair young man may leave
His love, upon the odorous summer eve,
When she turns sighing to her father's house,
And leaves him there alone and amorous,
Heartsick with all that shame has let him see,
Grieved that no bolder he has dared to be.

The Fourteenth Book tells of the Sirens, the Garden of the Hesperides,
and how the heroes sacrificed at Malea.

BOOK XV

BUT on the morrow did the Minyæ
Turn Argo's head once more to Thessaly,
And surely now the steersman knew his way,
As island after island every day
They coasted, with a soft land-wind abeam ;
And now at last like to a troubled dream
Seemed all the strange things they had seen erewhile,
Now when they knew the very green sea's smile
Beneath the rising and the setting sun,
And their return they surely now had won
To those familiar things long left behind,
When on their sails hard drave the western wind.

So past Eubœa did they run apace,
And swept with oars the perilous green race
Betwixt Cerinthus and the islands white ;
But, when they now had doubled that dread height,

The shields that glittered upon Argo's side
They drew inboard, and made a shift to hide
Her golden eye and gleaming braveries,
And heaped the deck with bales of merchandise,
And on their yards sails patched and brown they bent,
And crawling slowly, with six oars they went,
Till Argo seemed like some Phoenician
Grown old and leaky, on the water wan.

Now at the entering of their own green bay
There lies an island that men call to-day
Green Cicynethus, low, and covered o'er
With close-set trees, and distant from the shore
But some five furlongs, and a shallow sea
'Twixt main and island ripples languidly,
And on the shore there dwells not any man
For many a mile ; so there Erginus ran
Argo disguised, and steering skilfully,
Cast anchor with the island on his lee ;
Hid from the straits, and there struck sail and mast ;
Then to the island shore the heroes past,
And with their wide war-axes 'gan to lop
Full many a sapling with green-waving top
And full-leaved boughs of spreading maple-trees,
And covered Argo's seaward side with these.
And then the shipmen did Medea bid
To hold a shallop ready, while she hid
Her lovely body in a rough grey gown
And heavy home-spun mantle coarse and brown,
And round about her a great wallet slung,
And to her neck an uncouth image hung
Of Tauric Artemis, the cruel maid.

Then, all being ready, to the prince she said :—
“ O well-beloved, amongst our foes I go
Alone and weak, nor do I surely know
If I shall live or die there ; but do thou
Keep a watch ever, who from off the prow
Shall look towards white Iolchos o'er the bay,

And watching, wait until the seventh day,
And if no sign thou hast from me by then,
Believe me slain at hands of wicked men,
Or shut in some dark prison at the least,
While o'er my head thy foe holds royal feast.

"Then soothly if it lieth in thine heart
To leave this land untouched, do thou thy part ;
Yet do I think thou wilt be man enow
Unto the white-walled town to turn thy prow,
And either die a man or live a king,
Honoured of all, nor lacking anything
But me thy love—whom thou wilt soon forget,
When with thy tears my lone tomb has been wet
A little space ;—so be it, do thy will.
And of all good things mayst thou have thy fill
Before thou comest to the shadowy land
Where thou wilt strive once more to touch mine hand,
And have no power e'en to meet these eyes
That for thy love shall see such miseries."

She ceased, nigh weeping, but he wept indeed,
Such tears as come to men in utmost need,
When all words fail them, and the world seems gone,
And with their love they fill the earth alone,
Careless of shame, and not remembering death.

But she clung round about him, with her breath
Shortened with sobs, as she began to say :—
"Weep not, O love, for surely many a day
May we be merry and forget all ill,
Nor have I yet forgotten all my skill,
And ere the days are gone thou well mayst see
Thy deadly foe brought unto nought by me.
And if indeed the Gods give me the day,
Then shall thy wakeful watch see o'er the bay
Smoke in the day-time, red flame in the night
Rise o'er Iolchos' well-built walls and white ;
Then linger not, but run out every oar,
And hasten toward the many-peopled shore
That is thine own thenceforth, as I am thine."

Therewith from him she turned her face divine,
And reached the shallop over Argo's side,
That o'er the shallows soon began to glide,
Driven by arms of strong Eurydamas ;
But when the keel dragged on the rank sea-grass,
She stepped ashore, and back the hero turned
Unto his fellows, who, with hearts that burned
Unto the quays to bring great Argo's stem,
And gain the glory that was waiting them,
Watched ever for the sign across the bay,
Till nigh the dawning of the seventh day.

But from the shore unto a thick-leaved wood
Medea turned, drawing both cloak and hood
Right close about her, lest perchance some man,
Some hind, or fisher of the water wan,
Should wonder at her visage, that indeed
Seemed little worthy of that wretched weed.

In that thick wood a little stream there was,
That here was well-nigh hidden of the grass,
And there swelled into pools both clear and deep,
Wherein the images of trees did sleep,
For it was noontide of the summer day.
To such a pool Medea took her way,
And reaching it, upon the grass laid down
Her rough grey homespun cloak and wallet brown ;
And when her eyes had swept the space around,
Undid her tunic, that upon the ground
Fell huddled round her feet ; nor did she spare
To strip the linen from her body fair,
And shoes from off her feet ; then she drew near
The flowery edges of the streamlet clear,
And gazing down upon her image, stood,
Harkening the drowsy murmur of the wood ;
And since the wind was hushed that noon of day,
And moveless down her back the long locks lay,
Her very self an image seemed to be,
Wrought in some wondrous faint-hued ivory,

Carved by a master among cunning men.

So still she stood, that the quick water-hen
Noted her ~~not~~, as through the blue mouse-ear
He made his way ; the conies drew anear,
Nibbling the grass, and from an oak-twigh
A thrush poured forth his song unceasingly.

But in a while, sighing, she turned away,
And, going up to where the wallet lay,
She opened it, and thence a phial drew
That seemed to be well wrought of crystal blue,
Which when she had unstopped, therefrom she poured
Into the hollow of an Indian gourd,
A pale green liquor, wherefrom ~~there~~ arose
Such scent as o'er some poisonous valley blows,
Where nought but dull-scaled twining serpents dwell,
Nor any more now could the Colchian smell
The water-mint, the pine-trees, or the flower
Of the heaped-up sweet odorous virgin's bower.

But shuddering, and with lips grown pale and wan,
She took the gourd, and with shut eyes began
Therefrom her body to anoint all o'er ;
And this being done, she turned not any more
Unto the woodland brook, but hurrying,
Drew on her raiment, and made haste to sling
Her wallet round about her, nor forgot
The Tauric image, ere the lovely spot
She left unto the rabbit and the roe.

And now straight toward Iolchos did she go,
But as she went, a hideous, fearful change
Had come on her ; from sunken eyes and strange
She gazed around ; white grew her golden hair,
And seventy years her body seemed to bear ;
As though the world that coppice had passed by
For half an age, and caught her presently,
When from its borders once her foot had passed.

Then she began to murmur, as she cast
From changed eyes glances on her wrinkled hands :

" O Jason ! surely not for many lands,
Rich and gold-bearing lands, would I do this ;
But yet with thee to gain good peace and bliss
Far greater things would I have done to-day."

So saying, she made haste upon her way,
Until at last, when it was well-nigh night,
She reached the city crowned with towers white,
And passing by the brazen gates of it,
Forewearied, by a fountain did she sit ;
Where, as she waited, came an ancient crone,
Who, groaning, set her pitcher on the stone,
And seeing the Colchian, asked her what she was.

" Mother," Medea said, " I strive to pass
Unto fair Athens, where dwelt long ago
My fathers, if perchance folk yet may know
Where they lie buried, that on that same stone
I may lie down and die ; a hapless one,
Whom folk once called Aglaia, once called fair ;
For years, long years ago, my golden hair
Went down the wind, as carelessly I strayed
Along the wet sea-beach, of nought afraid,
And there my joy was ended suddenly,
For on me fell the rovers of the sea,
And bore me bound into the land of Thrace,
And thence to some unnamed, far northern place,
Where I, a rich man's daughter, learned to bear
Fetters and toil and scourging year by year ;
Till it has happed unto me at the last,
Now that my strength for toil is overpast,
That I am free once more, if that is ought,
Whom in all wretched places death has sought,
And surely now will find—but wilt thou give
Some resting-place to me, that I may live
Until I come to Athens and my grave ?
And certainly, though nought of gold I have,
In the far northland did I gather lore
Of this and that amid my labour sore ;
And chiefly of this Goddess, rites I know,

Whose image round my neck thou seest now,
Well-shod Diana—and a whispered word
Within her inmost temple once I heard
Concerning this : how men may grow to be
E'en as the Gods, and gain eternity,
And how the work of years may be undone."

When she had finished, the Thessalian crone,
Filling her jar with water, turned and said :—

"Surely, Athenian, I am sore afraid,
Ere thou hast learned thy lesson utterly,
And gained that new life, thou thyself wilt die ;
Nor will it profit me, who am a slave
Wishing for death, a wretched life to save :
But hearken now, if thou art wise and bold,
Then will I show thee how thou mayst earn gold
And thanks enow, by telling this thy tale
Unto rich folk, for them will it avail
To know thy secret ; rise, and come with me,
And the king's daughters surely shalt thou see ;
For on my road from nothing unto hell
His palace is the last lodge where I dwell,
And I am well aweary of it now,
And of my toil, thanked with hard word and blow."

"I thank thee, mother," said the Colchian maid,
"Nor of king's daughters shall I be afraid,
Whose ears Latona's daughter erst have heard,
Nor trembled at the heavy dreadful word."

Then on they passed, and as they went, the crone
Told her how Æson unto death was done,
And of the news that thither had been brought
Of those that o'er the sea that glory sought.
Namely, that when Æetes had been fain
To trap the Argo, all had been in vain,
Yet had he gone back well-nigh satisfied ;
For in the night to him a voice had cried
Louder and clearer than a mortal can :—
"Go back to Æa, sun-begotten man,
And there forget thy daughter and thy fleece,

But yet be merry, for the thieves of Greece
Shall live no longer than a poor wretch may
Who lies unholpen on a lonely way
Wounded, possessing nought but many woes,—
Lo, thus it happeneth now unto thy foes ! ”

This, said the crone, a Colchian had told
To Pelias, dweller in the house of gold,
And had large gifts from him ; who when he knew
The certainty of this, old Æson slew
With all his house who at Iolchos were.

“ So,” said she, “ if, for quieting his fear
Of the sea-rover, such things he did give,
What would his gifts be if thou mad'st him live
His life again, with none of all his name
Alive, to give him fear of death or shame ? ”
With that they came unto the royal house
Where Pelias dwelt, grown old and timorous,
Oppressed with blood of those that he had slain,
Desiring wealth and longer life in vain.

So there a court low-built the old crone sought,
And to her lodging the tired Colchian brought,
Where she might sleep, and gave her food and drink.
Then into sleep did wise Medea sink,
And dreamed that she herself, made ever young,
Gold-robed within some peaceful garden sung,
Like that where sung the wise Hesperides.
But as she walked between the smooth-stemmed trees
She saw the sea rise o'er the marble wall,
And rolling o'er, drown grass and flowers and all,
And draw on towards her, who no whit could move,
Though from the high land Jason, her own love,
Was shouting out to her, so then, at last,
She dreamed the waters over all had passed
And reached her feet, and o'er her coldly swept,
And still undrowned, beneath the waves she wept,
And still was Jason shouting to her there.

Therewith she woke, and felt the morning air
Cold on her face, because the ancient crone

Over her couch the casement had undone.
And as she oped her eyes, she heard her say :—
“ Awake, O guest, for yet another day
We twain must bear before we gain our rest.
But now indeed I think it to be best
That to my ladies I alone should show
That prayers, and rites, and wonders thou dost know,
Which thou wilt tell for gold ; for sure I deem
That to us dying folk nought good doth seem,
But hoarding for the years we shall not see.
So bide thou there, and I will come to thee
And bring thee word of what the queens may say.”
Then with these words she went upon her way,
While in her place alone Medea sat,
With eager heart, thinking of this or that,
And wishing that the glorious day were come,
When she should set her love within his home,
A king once more. So 'mid these thoughts, there came
Back to the place the wise Thessalian dame,
Who bade her rise and after her to go,
That she those marvels to the queens might show.
Therewith she brought her to a chamber where
Abode the royal maidens slim and fair,
All doing well-remembered works ; of whom
White-armed Alcestis sat before the loom,
Casting the shuttle swift from hand to hand,
The while Eradne's part it was to stand
Amongst the maids who carded out the wool
And filled the gleaming ivory shuttles full.
Amphinome, meantime, her golden-head
Bent o'er the spinners of the milk-white thread,
And by the growing web still set aside
The many-coloured bundles newly dyed,
Blood-red, and heavenly blue, and grassy green,
Yea, and more colours than man yet has seen
In flowery meadows midmost of the May.
Then to the royal maids the crone 'gan say :—
“ Behold the woman, O my mistresses,

Who 'midst the close-set gloomy northern trees
Has late learned that I told you of ; and ye
Who in this royal house live happily,
May well desire life for evermore,
Which unto me were but a burden sore."

Therewith she left them, but folk say, indeed,
That she who spoke was nought but Saturn's seed,
In very likeness of that woman old,
Whose body soon folk came on, dead and cold,
Within the place where she was wont to dwell.
Now how these things may be, I cannot tell,
But certainly Queen Juno's will was good
To finish that which, in the oaken wood
Anigh the Centaur's cave, she first began,
Giving good heart to the strange-nurtured man.

But, she being gone, fair-limbed Amphinome
Said : " Reverend mother, welcome here ye be,
And in return for thy so hard-earned lore
That thou wilt teach us, surely never-more
Shalt thou do labour whilst thou dwellest here,
But unto us shalt thou be lief and dear
As though thou wert the best of all our blood."

But, pondering awhile, Medea stood,
Then answered : " Lady, I am now grown old,
And but small gifts to me were heaps of gold,
Or rest itself, for that the tomb shall give ;
I say all things are nought, unless I live
So long henceforward, that I need not think
When into nothing I at last must sink ;
But take me now unto the mighty king
That rules this land, and there by everything
That he holds sacred, let him swear to me
That I shall live in peace and liberty
Till quiet death upon my head is brought ;
But this great oath being made, things shall be wrought
By me, that never can be paid with gold ;
For I will make that young which has grown old,

And that alive that ye have seen lie dead."

Then much they wondered at the words she said,
And from the loom did fair Alcestis rise,
And tall Amphinome withdrew her eyes
From the fair spinners, and Eradne left
The carding of the fine wool for the weft.
Then said Eradne : " Mother, fear not thou,
Surely our father is good man enow,
And will not harm thee : natheless, he will swear
By whatsoever thing he holdeth dear,
Nor needst thou have a doubt of him at all.
Come, for he sitteth now within the hall."
With that, she took her shoes from off the ground,
And round her feet the golden strings she bound,
As did her sisters, and fair cloaks they threw
About them, and their royal raiment drew
Through golden girdles, gemmed and richly wrought,
And forth with them the Colchian maid they brought.
But as unto the royal hall they turned,
Within their hearts such hot desire burned
For lengthening out the life they knew so sweet,
That scarce they felt the ground beneath their feet,
And through the marble court long seemed the way.
But when they reached the place, glittering and gay
With all the slain man's goods, and saw the king
Wearing his royal crown and mystic ring,
And clad in purple, and his wearied face,
Anxious and cruel, gaze from Æson's place,
A little thing it seemed to slay him there,
As one might slay the lion in his lair,
Bestrewn with bones of beast, and man, and maid.
Then as he turned to them, Alcestis said :—
" O lord and father, here we bring to thee
A wise old woman, come from over sea,
Who 'mid the gloomy, close-set northern trees
Has heard the words of reverend Goddesses
I dare not name aloud ; therefore she knows
Why this thing perishes, and that thing grows,

And what to unborn creatures must befall,
And this, the very chiefest thing of all,
To make the old man live his life again,
And all the lapse of years but nought and vain ;
But we, when these strange things of her we heard,
Trembled before her, and were sore afeard,
In 'midst of all our measureless desire
Within thy veins and ours to set new fire,
And with thee live for many a happy day,
Whilst all about us passes soon away."

Now paler grew the king's face at this word,
And 'mid strange hopes he, too, grew sore afeard,
As sighing, he began to think of days
Now long gone by, when he was winning praise,
And thought : " If so be I should never die,
Then would I lay aside all treachery,
And here should all folk live without alarm,
For to no man would I do any harm,
Whatso might hap, but I would bring again
The golden age, free from all fear and pain."

But through his heart there shot a pang of fear,
As to the queen he said : " Why art thou here,
Since thou hast mastered this all-saving art,
Keeping but vagrant life for thine own part
Of what thou boastest with the Gods to share ?
Thou, but a dying woman, nowise fair."

" Pelias," she said, " far from the north I come,
But in Erechtheus' city was my home,
Where being alone, upon a luckless day,
By the sea-rovers was I snatched away,
And in their long ship, with bound, helpless hands,
Was brought to Thrace, and thence to northern lands,
Of one of which I scarcely know the name,
Nor could your tongue the uncouth letters frame.
There had I savage masters, and must learn
With aching back to bend above the quern ;
There must I learn how the poor craftsman weaves,
Nor earn his wages ; and the barley-sheaves

Must bind in August ; and across the snow,
Unto the frozen river must I go,
When the white winter lay upon the land,
And therewithal must I dread many a hand,
And writhe beneath the whistle of the whip.
“ ‘Mid toils like these my youth from me did slip,
Uncomforted, through lapse of wretched years,
Till I forgot the use of sobs and tears,
And like a corpse about my labour went,
Grown old before my time, and worn and bent.
And then at last this good to me betid,
That my wise mistress strove to know things hid
From mortal men, and doubted all the rest,
Babblers and young, who in our fox's nest
Dwelt through the hideous changes of the year :
Then me she used to help her, and so dear
I grew, that when upon her tasks she went,
Into all dangerous service was I sent ;
And many a time, within the woods alone,
Have I sat watching o'er the heaps of stone
Where dwell the giants dead ; and many a time
Have my pale lips uttered the impious rhyme
That calls the dead from their unchanged abode ;
Till on my soul there lay a heavy load
Of knowledge, not without reward, for I
No longer went in rags and misery,
But in such bravery as there they had
My toil-worn body now was fairly clad,
And feared by man and maid did I become,
And mistress of my mistress' dreary home.
“ Moreover, whether that, being dead to fear,
All things I noted, or that somewhat dear
I now was grown to those dread Goddesses,
I know not, yet amidst the haunted trees
More things I learned than my old mistress did,
Yea, some things surely from all folk else hid,
Whose names once spoken would unroof this hall,
And lay Iolchos underneath a pall

Of quick destruction ; and when these were learned,
At last my mistress all her wage had earned,
And to the world was dead for evermore.

“ But me indeed the whole house hated sore,
First for my knowledge, next that, sooth to say,
I, when I well had passed my evil day,
And came to rule, spared not my fellows ought ;
Whereby this fate upon my head was brought,
That flee I must lest worse should hap to me ;
So on my way unto the Grecian sea
With weary heart and manifold distress,
My feet at last thy royal pavement press.
My lips beseech thy help, O mighty King !
Help me, that I myself may do the thing
I most desire, and this great gift give
To thee and thine, from this time forth to live
In youth and beauty while the world goes by
With all its vain desires and misery.”

“ And if thou doubttest still, then hear me say
The words thou spakst upon a long-past day,
When thou wert fearful, and the half-shod man
Had come upon thee through the water wan.”

She ceased awhile, and therewith Pelias,
With open mouth and eyes as fixed as glass,
Stared at her, wondering. Then again she said :—
“ Awhile ago, when he thou knowest dead,
And he thou thinkest dead, were by thy side,
A crafty wile thou forgedst ; at that tide
Telling the tale of Theban Athamas,
And how that Phryxus dead at Æa was,
Thinking (and not in vain) to light the fire
Of glorious deeds, and measureless desire
Of fame within the hearts of men o’erbold.

“ For thus thou saidst : ‘ So is the story told
Of things that happened forty years ago,
Nor of the Greeks has there been any one

To set the bones of Phryxus in a tomb,
Or mete out to the Colchian his due doom.'

"So saidst thou then, and by such words didst drive
Thy nephew in a hopeless game to strive,
Wherefore thou deemest wisely he is dead,
And all the words that he can say are said."

She ceased again, while pale and shuddering,
Across his eyes the crafty, fearful king
Drew trembling hands. But yet again she spoke :—
"What if the Gods by me the strong chain broke
Of thy past deeds, ill deeds wrought not in vain,
And thou with new desires lived again?
Durst I still trust thee with my new-gained life?
Who for the rest am not thy brother's wife,
Thy nephew, or thy brother. Be it so.
Yet since the foolish hearts of men I know,
Swear on this image of great Artemis
That unto me thy purpose harmless is,
Nor wilt thou do me hurt, or more or less.
Then while thy lips the ivory image press,
Will I call down all terrors that I know
Upon thine head if thou shouldst break thy vow.
"Yet for thyself dost thou trust what I say,
Or wilt thou still be dying day by day?"

"Yea," said the king, "yea, whosoe'er thou art,
Needs must I trust thee, in such wise my heart
Desires life again when this is done.
Give me the image, O thou fearful one,
Who knowest all my life, who in the breath
Wherein thou prayest help still threatenest death."

Then on the image did she swear the king,
But while he spoke was she still muttering,
With glittering eyes fixed on him; but at last,
When from his lips the dreadful word had passed,
She said: "O King, pray that thou mayst not die
Before the fifth day's sun has risen high;
Yet on to-morrow morn shalt thou behold

This hair of mine all glittering as gold,
My tottering feet firm planted on the ground,
My grey and shrivelled arms grown white and round,
As once, when by Ilissus' side I trod,
A snare of beauty to a very God,
To young men's eyes a fierce consuming fire."

So saying, did she kindle fresh desire
In the king's fainting heart, until he thought—
"Nay, if new life hereby to me is brought,
Withal there may be brought a lovely mate
To share my happy days and scorn of fate."
Then did he bid his daughters straight to go
With that wise woman, nor spare ought to do
That she might bid them, and they wondering,
But in their hearts yet fearful of the thing,
Unto the women's chamber led her back,
And bade her say what matters she might lack.

Then little did she ask unto her need,
But fair cold water, and some fitting weed,
And in a close-shut place to be alone,
Because no eye must see the wonder done.

And "Oh," she said, "fair women, haste ye now,
For surely weaker every hour I grow,
And fear to die ere I can live again."
Then through the house they hastened, and with pain
A brazen caldron their fair hands bore up,
As well wrought over as a king's gold cup.
Which in a well-hung chamber did they set,
And filled with clear cold water, adding yet
New raiment wrought about with ruddy gold,
And snowy linen wrapped in many a fold.

Then did Medea turn unto the three,
And said: "Farewell, for no more shall ye see
These limbs alive, or hear this feeble voice,
For either shall my changed lips rejoice
In my new beauty, or else stark and cold
This wretched body shall your eyes behold.
Wait now until six hours are over-passed,

And if ye still shall find the door shut fast,
Then let the men bring hammers, neither doubt
That thence my corpse alone shall they bear out.
But if the door is open or ajar,
Draw nigh and see how great my helpers are,
And greet what there ye see with little fear,
For whatsoever may have touched me here,
By then, at least, shall no one be with me,
And nought but this old sorceress shall ye see
Grown young again ; alas ! grown young again !
Would God that I were past the fear and pain ! ”

So said the Colchian ; but their fearful eyes
Turned hastily from such hid mysteries
As there might lurk ; and to their bower they gat,
And well-nigh silent o’er the weaving sat,
And did what things they needs must do that day,
Until that six hours’ space had passed away.

Then had the sun set, and the whitening moon
Shone o’er the gardens where the brown bird’s tune
Was quivering through the roses red and white,
And sweeter smelt the flowers with the night ;
But to the chamber where there lay alone
The wise Medea, up the faint grey stone
Two rose-trees climbed, along a trellis led,
And with their wealth of flowers white and red
Another garden of the window made.

So now the royal sisters, sore afraid,
Each with a taper in her trembling hand,
Before the fateful chamber-door did stand
And heard no noise ; whereon Amphinome
Pushed at the door, that yielded, and the three
Passing with beating hearts the oaken door,
Pressed noiseless feet upon the polished floor,
Reddening the moonshine with their tapers’ light.

There they beheld the caldron gleaming bright,
And on the floor the heap of raiment rent
That erst had hid the body old and bent ;

And there a crystal phial they beheld
Empty, that once some wondrous liquor held ;
And by the window-side asleep they saw
The Colchian woman, white without a flaw
From head to heel ; her round arms by her side,
Her fair face flushed with sweet thoughts, as a bride
Who waits the coming of some well-loved man.
Softly she breathed, the while the moonlight ran
In silver ripples o'er her hair of gold.

But when that loveliness they did behold,
They cried aloud for wonder, though not yet
Her happy dreaming thoughts would she forget,
But into spoken words her murmuring grew,
Though of their purport nought the sisters knew,
Since in the outland Colchian tongue she spoke ;
Then, while they waited, slowly she awoke,
And looking round her, still with half-shut eyes,
She said : " O damsels, fain would I arise,
I hear the morning murmur of the birds
And lowing of released and hungry herds
Across the meadows, sweet with vetch and bean,
And the faint ripple of the Phasis green."

But with that last word did she start upright,
Shading her grey eyes from the tapers' light,
And said : " O queens, and are ye come to me
This eve, my triumph over time to see ?
And is my boast for nought ? behold me made
Like the fair casket-bearer who betrayed
The luckless man while yet the world was young."
So saying did she speak as one who sung,
So sweet her voice was ; then she stepped adown
From off the silken couch, and rough and brown
They seemed beside her, fair maids though they were.

But silently they stood, and wondered there,
And from their hearts had flown all thoughts at last
But that of living while the world went past.

Then at her feet Alcestis knelt and prayed :—

" O, who can see thee, Goddess, unafraid,
Yet thou thyself hast promised life to us,
More than man's feeble life, and perilous,
And if thy promise now thou makest vain,
How can we live our thoughtless life again ?
Then, would thou ne'er hadst left thine heavenly home,
And o'er the green Thessalian meadows come ! "

Then spoke Medea : " Young as ye see me
The king, your father, in few days shall be,
And when that he has gained his just reward,
Your lives from death and danger will I guard,
Natheless no Goddess am I, but no more
Than a poor wanderer from shore to shore,
Though loved by her the swift of Goddesses,
Who now is glancing 'twixt the dark grey trees,
E'en while we speak. Now leave me to my rest,
For this new-changed body is oppressed
By all the thoughts that round my heart will throng
Of ancient days, and hopes forgotten long ;
Go, therefore, but come hither with the sun
To do my bidding ; then shall there be done
Another marvel ere the morn comes round,
If yet ye three are dwelling above ground."

Then, trembling, they unto their chamber passed,
But, they being gone, she made the strong door fast,
And soon in deep sleep on the couch she lay
Until the golden sun brought back the day ;
Nor could she fail arising to be glad
That once again her own fair form she had,
And as the fresh air met her pleasantly,
She smiled, her image in the bath to see
That had been lost since at the noon she stood
Beside the still pool in the lonely wood,
And she rejoiced her combed-out hair to bind,
And feel the linen in the morning wind
Fluttering about, in kissing side and limb,
And it was sweet about her ankles slim

To make the gemmed thongs of the sandals meet,
With rosy fingers touching her soft feet.

But she being clad, there came the ladies three,
Who seemed by her but handmaidens to be,
And such indeed they were, as dumb with awe
In the fresh morn that loveliness they saw.

Then said Medea : " Fair queens well be ye !
Surely in happy hour ye come to me,
Who, if I might, would do the whole world good.
But now take heed ; is there some close dark wood
Anigh the town ?—thither will we to-night,
And in that place, hidden from all men's sight,
Shall ye see wonders passing human thought.
But thither, by your hands there must be brought
Some ancient beast at very point to die,
That ye may see how loved an one am I
By dreadful Gods ; there, too, must ye convey
A brazen caldron ere the end of day,
And nigh the place there must not fail to be
Some running stream to help our mystery.
Yet more ; take heed that She who helpeth me,
Whose name I name not, willeth not to see
The robes of kings and queens upon her slaves ;
Therefore, if ye would please the one who saves,
This night must ye be clad in smocks of black,
And all adornment must your bodies lack,
Nor must there be a fillet on your hair,
And the hard road must feel your feet all bare."

" Lady," Eradne said, " all shall be done,
Nor wilt thou yet have had beneath the sun
More faithful servants than we are to thee ;
But wilt thou not the king my father see,
And gladden him, that he may give thee things
Such as the heart desires—the spoil of kings ? "

" Nay," said Medea, " much have I to think
Ere the hot sun beneath the sea shall sink,
And much to call to mind, and for your sake
Unto my Helper many a prayer to make."

With that they went, and she, being left alone,
Took up the image of the swift-foot one,
Which for a hidden casket served her well,
And wherein things were laid right strange to tell.
So this and that she looked at, and the while
She muttered charms learned in the river isle.

But at the noontide did they bring her food,
Saying that all was ready in the wood,
And that the night alone they waited now,
Ere unto them those marvels she might show.
Therefore Medea bade them come again
When all the house of peaceful sleep was fain,
And nought was stirring : so at dead of night
They came to her in black apparel dight,
Bearing like raiment for the Colchian,
Who did it on before their faces wan
And troubled eyes ; then out of gates they stole,
Setting their faces to the wished-for goal.

Now nigh Anaurus a blind pathway leads
Betwixt the yellow corn and whispering reeds,
The home of many a shy, quick-diving bird ;
Thereby they passed, and as they went they heard
Splashing of fish, and ripple of the stream ;
And once they saw across the water's gleam
The black boat of some fisher of the night,
And from the stream had drawn back in affright,
But that the Colchian whispered : " Wise be ye,
Thessalian sisters, yet with certainty
Make onward to the wood, for who indeed,
Beholding our pale faces and black weed,
Would come the nigher to us ? Would not he
Think that some dread things we must surely be,
And tremble till we passed ? Haste, for the night
Is waning now, and danger comes with light."
Then on they passed, and soon they reached the wood,
And straight made for the midst of it, where stood
An old horned ram bound fast unto a tree,

Which the torch-bearer, tall Amphinome,
Showed to Medea, and not far therefrom
Unto a brazen caldron did they come,
Hidden with green boughs ; then Medea bade
That by their hands a high pile should be made
Of fallen wood, and all else fit to burn ;
Which done, unto the caldron did they turn
And bore it to the river, and did strain
Their fair round arms to bear it back again
When it was filled, and raised it on the pile.
And then with hands unused to service vile
Lit up the fire, while Medea took
Dried herbs from out her wallet, which she shook
Into the caldron ; till at last a cloud
Rose up therefrom and the dark trees did shroud.
Then did she bid them the old ram to lead
Up to the caldron's side, and with good heed
To quench his just departing feeble life ;
So in his throat Eradne thrust the knife,
While in the white arms of Amphinome
And fair Alcestis, bleating piteously,
Feebly he struggled ; so being slain at last,
Piecemeal his members did the sisters cast
Into the seething water ; then drew back
And hid their faces in their raiment black,
The while Medea midst the flickering light
Still sprinkled herbs from out her fingers white,
And in a steady voice at last did say :—
“ O thou that turnest night into the day,
O thou the quencher of unhallowed fire,
The scourge of hot, inordinate desire,
Hast thou a mind to help me on this night,
That wrong may still be wrong, and right be right
In all men's eyes ? A little thing I ask
Before I put an ending to my task.”
Scarce had she finished, ere a low black cloud
Seemed closing o'er the forest, and aloud
Medea cried : “ Oh, strong and terrible !

I fear thee not, do what may please thee well."
Then as the pale Thessalians with affright
Crouched on the earth, forth leapt the lightning white
Over their shrinking heads, and therewithal
The thunder crashed, and down the rain did fall,
As though some angry deity were fain
To make a pool of the Thessalian plain.

Till in a while it ceased, and all was stilled
Except the murmur of some brook new-filled,
And dripping of the thick-leaved forest trees
As they moved gently in the following breeze.
Yet still King Pelias' daughters feared to rise,
And with wet raiment still they hid their eyes,
And trembled, and white-armed Amphinome
Had dropped the long torch of the resin-tree,
That lay half-charred among the tall wet grass.
But unto them did wise Medea pass,
And said: "O, daughters of the sea-born man,
Rise up, for now the stars are growing wan,
And the grey dawn is drawing near apace;
Nor need ye fear to see another face
Than this of mine, and all our work is done
We came to do."

Then slowly, one by one,
The sisters rose, and, fearful, drew anigh
The place where they had seen the old ram die;
And there beheld, by glimmering twilight grey,
Where on its side the brazen caldron lay,
And on the grass and flowers that hid the ground,
Half-charred extinguished brands lay all around,
But yet no token of the beast was there;
But 'mid the brands a lamb lay, white and fair,
That now would raise his new-born head and bleat,
And now would lick the Colchian's naked feet,
As close he nestled to her: then the three
Drew nigh unto that marvel timidly,
And gazed at him with wide eyes wondering.

Thereat Medea raised the new-changed thing

In her white arms, and smiled triumphantly,
And said : " What things the Gods will do for me
Ye now behold ; take, then, this new-born beast,
And hope to sit long ages at the feast,
And this your youth and loveliness to keep
When all that ye have known are laid asleep.
Yet steel your hearts to do a fearful thing,
Ere this can happen, for unto the king
Must your hands do what they have done to-night
To this same beast. And now, to work aright
What yet is needful to this mystery,
Will be four days' full bitter toil for me.
Take heed that silence, too, on this ye keep,
Or else a bitter harvest shall ye reap."

So said she, willing well indeed to know,
Before the promised sign she dared to show,
What honour Pelias in Iolchos had,
And if his death would make folk glad or sad.
But now they turned back on their homeward way,
Fleeing before the coming of the day ;
Nor yet the flinty way their feet did feel,
Nor their wet limbs the wind, that 'gan to steal
From out the north-west ere the sun did rise.
And swiftly though they went, yet did their eyes
Behold no more than eyes of those that dream
The crumbling edges of the swirling stream
Or fallen tree-trunks or the fallow rough.
But Juno sent them feeling just enough
By the lone ways to come unto the town
And fair-walled palace, and to lay them down
Upon their fragrant beds, that stood forlorn
Of their white bodies, waiting for the morn
In chambers close-shut from the dying night.

But since Medea fain would know aright
What the folk willed to Pelias in the town,
Early next day she did on her the brown
And ragged raiment, and the sisters told

That she must find the place where herbs were sold,
And there buy this and that ; therewith she went
About the town, seeming crook-backed and bent ;
And, hidden in her mantle and great hood,
Within the crowded market-place she stood,
And marked the talk of all the busy folk,
And ever found that under Pelias' yoke
All people groaned : and therefore with good heart
She set herself to work out all her part.

For, going back, till the fifth day was gone
She dwelt within her chamber all alone,
Except that now and then the sisters came
To bring her food ; and whiles they saw a flame,
Strange-coloured, burning on the hearth, while she
Was bending o'er it, muttering wearily,
And whiles they saw her bent o'er parchment strange,
And letters that they knew not ; but no change
They ever saw upon her lovely face.

But at the last, she, mindful of the place
Where lay fair Argo's glorious battered keel,
And that dread hidden forest of bright steel,
Said to Eradne, when her food she brought
Upon the sixth morn : " Sister, I have thought
How best to carry out the mystery
That is so dear at heart to thee and me,
And find that this night must the thing be done,
So seek a place where we may be alone,
High up, and looking southward o'er the bay ;
Thither ere midnight must ye steal away,
And under a huge caldron set dry brands.
And that being done, take sharp swords in your hands,
And while I watch the sea, and earth, and air,
Go ye to Pelias' well-hung chamber fair ;
There what ye will ye may most surely do,
If ye will work the way I counsel you."
Therewith a phial in her hand she set,
And said : " Who tasteth this will soon forget
Both life and death, and for no noise will wake

In two days' space ; therefore this phial take,
And with the king's drink see ye mingle it,
As well ye may, and let his servants sit
O'er wine so honied at the feast to-night.
Then certes shall their sleep not be so light,
That bare feet pattering across the floor,
Or unused creaking of an open door,
Shall rouse them ; though no deadly drug it is,
But bringer of kind sleep and dreamy bliss.

" But now, what think'st thou ? Are your hearts so
good,

That ye will dare to shed your father's blood
That he may live for ever ?—then is he
The luckiest of all men. But if ye
Draw back now, after all my prayers and tears,
Then were it best that ye should end your fears
By burning me with quick fire ere to-night.
And yet not thus should ye lead lives aright,
And free from fear ; because the sandalled queen
Doth ever keep a memory fresh and green
For all her faithful servants—ye did see
Late in the green-wood how she loveth me.—

" Therefore be wise, and when to-night ye draw
The sharp-edged steel, glittering without a flaw,
Cast fear and pity from you. Pity him
I bid you rather, who with shrunken limb
And sunken eyes, remembers well the days
When in the ranks of war he garnered praise,
Which unarmed, feeble, as his last year ends,
Babbling amongst the elders now he spends.
Such shall not Pelias be, but rather now
The breath of new life past misdeeds shall blow
Adown the wind, and, taught by his old life,
Shall he live honoured, free from fear or strife."

" Fear not," Eradne said, " our will to-night,
For all thy bidding will we do outright,
Since still a Goddess thou dost seem to be
To us poor strugglers with mortality.

And for the secret spot this night we need,
Close to the sea a place I know indeed,
Upon the outskirts of this palace fair ;
And on this night of all nights, close by there
My father sleeps, as oft his custom is,
When he is fain a Mysian girl to kiss,
Sea-rovers sold to him three months ago.
There after midnight we shall be alone
Beyond all doubt, since this place by the sea
A temple is of some divinity,
Whose very name men now have clean forgot,
And, as folk think, ill spirits haunt the spot ;
So all men fear it sore, but soothly we
Fear nought of all these things, being led by thee.”
She ceased, and from the Colchian won much praise,
And promises of many happy days.

Then as upon the door she laid her hand,
Medea said : “ When midnight hides the land,
Come here to me, and bring me to that place ;
Then look the last upon your father’s face
As ye have known it for these eighteen years,
Furrowed by eld and drawn by many fears ;
But when ye come, in such guise be ye clad
As in the wood that other night ye had.”
Then did Eradne leave her, and the day
Through sunshine and through shadow passed away.

But with the midnight came the sisters three,
To lead her to that temple by the sea,
And in black raiment had they hurried there,
With naked feet, and unadorned loose hair,
E’en as the other night Medea bade,
Except that each one had a trenchant blade
Slung round her neck, wherewith to do the deed.

Of these Alcestis trembled like the reed
Set midmost of some quickly running stream,
But with strange fire Eradne’s eyes did gleam,
And a bright flush was burning on her cheek,

As still her fingers the sharp steel did seek ;
While tall Amphinome, grown pale and white
Beyond all measure, gazed into the night
With steady eyes, as with the queen they went
To that lone place to work out their intent.

So when all courts and corridors were passed,
Unto the ancient fane they came at last,
And found it twofold ; for below there stood
Square marble pillars, huge, and red as blood,
And wrought all o'er with fretting varying much ;
Heavy they were, and nowise like to such
As men built in the lands Medea knew,
Or in the countries fate had led her through :
But they, set close and thick, aloft did hold
A well-wrought roof, where still gleamed scraps of gold,
That once told tales of Gods none living praise ;
And on this roof some king of later days
Had built another temple long before
The Minyæ came adown unto that shore
From fair Orchomenus, of whose rites indeed
And to what Gods the victim then did bleed,
Men knew but little ; but therein there rose
Fair slim white pillars set in goodly rows,
And garlanded with brazen fruit and flowers,
That gleaming once, through lapse of many hours,
Now with black spirals wrapt the pillars white.
But this fair fane was open to the night
On one side only, toward the restless sea ;
And there a terrace, wrought full cunningly,
Clear of the pillars hung above the sand.
Now went those maids, groping with outstretched hand
Betwixt the pillars of the undercroft,
Until they reached a stair that led aloft
Into the windy, long-deserted fane
Of younger days ; but when their feet did gain
The open space above the murmuring sea,
In whispers did the queens of Thessaly
Show to the Colchian where the great pile was,

Built 'neath a vessel of bright polished brass,
And many water-jars there stood around ;
And as they spoke, to them, the faint low sound
Of their own whispered voices seemed as loud
As shouts that break from out the armed crowd
Of warriors ready for the fight.

But she
Spoke with no lowered voice, and said : " O ye !
Be brave to-night, and thenceforth have no fear
Of God or man since ye to me are dear.
Light up the torches, because certainly
Those that may see them gleaming o'er the sea
Will think they light but spirits of the air."
Then presently the torches out did flare,
And lighted up the smile upon her face
And the tall pillars of the holy place,
And the three sisters gazing at her there,
Wild-looking, with the sea-wind in their hair,
And scant black raiment driven from their feet.

But when her eyes their fearful eyes did meet,
With wild appealing glances as for aid,
Some little pity touched the Colchian maid,
Some vague regret for their sad destiny.
But to herself she said : " So must it be,
And to such misery shall such a king
Lead wife and child, and every living thing
That trusts him." Then she said, " Leave me alone,
And go and do that which were better done
Ere any streak of dawn makes grey the sky,
And come to me when ye have seen him lie
Dead to his old life of misdeeds and woe."

Then voiceless from the torchlight did they go
Into the darkness, and she, left alone,
Set by the torches till the deed was done
Within the pillars, and turned back again
With eager eyes to gaze across the main,
But nothing she beheld by that starlight

But on the beach the line of breakers white,
And here and there, above the unlit grey,
Some white-topped billow dotting the dark bay.

Then, sighing, did she turn herself around
And looked down toward the plot of unused ground,
Whereby they passed into that fateful place,
And gazed thereon with steadfast wary face,
And there the pavement, whitened by the wind,
Betwixt the turf she saw, and nigh it, twined
About a marble image carelessly,
A white wild-rose, and the grey boundary
Of wind-beat stone, through whose unhinged door
Their stealthy feet had passed a while before.

Nought else she saw for a long dreary hour,
For all things lay asleep in bed or bower,
Or in the little-lighted mountain caves,
Or 'neath the swirling streams and toppling waves.

She trembled then, for in the eastern sky
A change came, telling of the dawning nigh,
And with swift footsteps she began to pace
Betwixt the narrow limits of the place ;
But as she turned round toward the close once more
Her eyes beheld the pavement by the door
Hid by some moving mass ; then joyfully
She waved her white arms toward the murmuring sea,
And listened trembling, and although the sound
Of breakers that the sandy sea-beach ground
Was loud in the still night, yet could she hear
Sounds like the shuffling steps of those that bear
Some heavy thing, and as she gazed, could see
The thin black raiment of the sisters three
Blown out, and falling backward as they bent
Over some burden, and right slowly went ;
And 'twixt their arms could she behold the gleam
Of gold or gems, or silver-broidered seam,
Till all was hidden by the undercroft.
And then she heard them struggling bear aloft
That dreadful burden, and then went to meet,

With beating heart, their slow ascending feet,
Taking a half-burnt torch within her hand.

There by its light did she behold them stand
Breathless upon the first stone of that fane,
And with no word she beckoned them again
To move on toward the terrace o'er the sea,
And, turning, went before them silently.

And so at last the body down they laid
Close by the caldron, and Eradne said :—

“ O thou, our life and saviour ! linger not,
We pray thee now ! because our hearts are hot
To see our father look with other eyes
Upon the sea, the green earth, and the skies,
And praise us for this seeming impious deed.”

Not heeding her, Medea saw the weed
She erst beheld all glittering in the hall,
And that same mantle as a funeral pall
Which she had seen laid over either knee,
The wonder of King Æson's treasury,
Which wise Phœnicians for much coined gold,
And many oxen, years ago had sold
To Æson, when folk called him king and lord.

Then to the head she went, and with no word
The white embroidered linen drew away
Over the face of the dead man, that lay
As though she doubted yet what thing it was,
And saw indeed the face of Pelias.

Then o'er her pale face a bright flush there came,
And, turning, did she set the torches' flame
Unto the dry brands of the well-built pyre,
And, standing back, and waving from the fire
The shuddering girls, somewhat thereon she cast,
Like unto incense : then with furious blast
Shot up a smokeless flame into the air,
Quivering and red, nor then did she forbear
To cry aloud, in her old Colchian tongue,
Proud words, and passionate, that strangely rung

Within the poor bewildered sisters' ears,
Filling their hearts with vague and horrid fears.
"O love!" she said, "O love! O sweet delight!
Hast thou begun to weep for me this night,
Dost thou stretch out for me thy mighty hands—
The feared of all, the graspers of the lands?
Come then, O love, across the dark seas come,
And triumph as a king in thine own home,
While I, the doer of this happy deed,
Shall sit beside thee in this wretched weed;
That folk may know me by thine eyes alone
Still blessing me for all that I have done.
Come, king, and sit upon thy father's seat,
Come, conquering king, thy conqueror love to meet."

But as she said these words the luckless three
Stared at her glowing face all helplessly,
Nor to their father's corpse durst turn their eyes,
While in their hearts did fearful thoughts arise.
But now Medea, ceasing, fed the fire
With that same incense, and the flame rose higher,
A portent to the dwellers in the town,
Unto the shepherd waking on the down,
A terror telling of ill things to be.

But from the God-built tower of Thessaly,
Grey Pelion, did the centaur Cheiron gaze,
And when he saw that ruddy flame outblaze,
He smiled, and said: "So comes to pass the word
That in the forests of the north I heard,
And in such wise shall love be foiled, and hate,
And hope of gain, opposing steadfast fate."

So to the flowery eastern slopes he gat,
Waiting the dawn, nor hoped for this or that.

BOOK XVI

BUT other watchers were there on that night,
Who saw the birth of that desired light
From nigh green Cicynethus' woody shore.
For in mid-channel there, with every oar
Run out, and cable ready for the slip,
Did Jason hold his glorious storm-tossed ship,
While in the top did keen-eyed Lynceus stand,
And every man had ready to his hand
Sharp spear, and painted shield, and grinded sword.
Thus as they waited, suddenly the word
Rang out from Jason's mouth, and in the sea
The cable splashed, and straight the Minyæ
Unto their breasts the shaven ash-trees brought,
And, as the quivering blades the water caught,
Shouted for joy, and quickly passed the edge
Of Cicynethus, green with reed and sedge.
And whitening the dark waters of the bay,
Unto Iolchos did they take their way.

Meanwhile the Colchian queen triumphantly
Watched the grey dawn steal forth above the sea,
Still murmuring softly in the Colchian tongue,
While o'er her head the flickering fire hung,
And in the brazen caldron's lips did gleam ;
Wherefrom went up a great white cloud of steam,
To die above their heads in that fresh air.
But Pelias' daughters, writhing in despair,
Silent for dread of her, she noted nought,
Nor of the dead man laid thereby she thought.

At last came forward tall Amphinome,
And said : " O Queen, look o'er the whitening sea,
And tell us now what thing it is we lack
To bring our father's vanished breathing back
With that new life, whereof thou spak'st to us."
So in a broken voice and piteous

She spoke ; but when no answer came at all,
Nor did Medea's grey eyes on her fall,
She cried again : " O, art thou pitiless ?
Wilt thou not note our measureless distress ?
Wilt thou not finish that thou hast begun ?
Lo, in a little while the piercing sun
Shall find us slayers of our father here.
Then if thou hast no pity, hast thou fear ?
We are king's daughters still, and with us still
Are men who heed nought but to do our will ;
And if thou fall'st into the hands of these,
Thou shalt lament the gloomy northern trees
And painless death of threescore years and ten,
And little shall thy beauty help thee then."
So cried she shrilly in her gathering ire ;
But when Medea answered not, the fire
Burnt out within her heart, and on her knees
She fell, and cried : " O crown of Goddesses,
Forgive these impious words, and answer me,
Else shall I try if the green heaving sea
Will hide from all these impious blood-stained hands,
Or bear them far away to savage lands,
That know no good or evil ; O speak, speak !
How can I pray thee when all words are weak ?
What gifts, what worship, shall we give to thee ? "
E'en as she spoke, Medea seemed to see
A twinkling light far off amidst the bay,
Then from the suppliant hand she drew away,
Nor turned to her ; but looking seaward still,
She cried : " O love ! yet shalt thou have thy fill
Of wealth, and power, and much desired fame,
Nor shall the Grecian folk forget my name
Who dearly bought these for thee ; therefore come,
And with the sun behold thy wished-for home."
So spoke she, and no less the wretched three
Beheld that light grow greater o'er the sea,
And therewithal the grey dawn coming fast,
And from them now well-nigh all hope had passed.

But fair Alcestis, grovelling on the ground,
And crying out, cast both her arms around
Medea's knees, and panting, and half-dead,
Poured forth wild words, nor knew the words she said,
While the two others, mad with their despair,
Ran wailing through the pillars here and there,
Nor knew indeed what thing had come on them,
For now, at last, fair Argo's plunging stem
Medea saw in the still gathering light,
And round about her the sea beaten white
With steady oars ; then she looked down, and said :
" What ! art thou praying for the newly dead,
For him who yesterday beheld the sun ?
And dost thou think that I am such an one
That what the Gods have unmade I can make ?
Lo ! with the dead shall Pelias awake,
And see such things as dead men's eyes may see."

Then as Alcestis, moaning wretchedly,
Fell back upon the pavement, thus she said :—
" Take comfort yet, and lift again thine head,
O foolish woman ! Dost thou think that fate
Has yet been stopped by any love or hate,
Or fear of death, or man's far-shouted fame ?
And still doubt not that I, who have to name
The wise Medea, in such ways as this
Have long been struggling for a life of bliss
I shall not gain ; and thus do all men do,
And win such wages as have happed to you.
" Rise up and gaze at what the fates have wrought,
And all the counsels they have brought to nought
On this same morn. Hearken the dash of oars
That nevermore ye thought would brush these shores ;
Behold the man stand on the high-raised prow
That this dead man so surely dead did know.
See how he raises in his conquering hand
The guarded marvel of the Colchian land,
This dead king deemed hid death and unknown woe.
See how his folk ashore the grapnels throw ;—

And see, and see ! beneath the risen sun,
How fair a day for this land is begun.
And let king Pelias rise if now he can,
And stop the coming of the half-shod man."

E'en as she spoke, the keel had touched the sand,
And catching up her raiment in her hand,
She ran with speed, and gained the temple close,
Made fragrant with that many-flowered rose,
And o'er its daisied grass sped toward the beach ;
But when her feet the wrinkled sand did reach,
There, nigh the ship, alone did Jason stand,
Holding two spears within his ready hand ;
And right and left he peered forth warily,
As though he thought some looked-for thing to see.

But when he saw her hurrying him to meet,
With wild wind-tangled hair, and naked feet,
And outstretched hands, and scanty raiment black,
But for one moment did he start aback,
As if some guardian spirit of the land
Had come upon him ; but the next, his hand
Had caught her slim wrist, and he shouted out :
" Ashore, O heroes ! and no more have doubt
That all is well done we have wished were done ;
By this my love, by this the glorious one,
The saviour of my life, the Queen of Love,
To whom alone of all who are above,
Or on the earth, will I pour wine, or give
The life of anything that once did live."

Then all men shouting, leapt forth on the sand,
And stood about them, shield and spear in hand,
Rejoicing that their mighty task was done ;
But as he saw the newly-risen sun
Shine on the town, upon their left that lay,
Then, smiling joyously, did Jason say :—
" O heroes, tell me, is the day not won ?

Look how the sun's rays now are stealing on,
And soon will touch that temple's marble feet
Where stood the king our parting keel to greet,
But the great golden image of the God
Holds up, unlighted yet, his crystal rod,
And surely ere the noon shall gleam on it
Upon my father's throne his son shall sit,
Hedged round with spears of loyal men and true,
And all be done that we went forth to do."

But, 'midst their shouting, spoke the queen again :—
" Jason, behold hereby this ancient fane—
Amidst its pillars let the heroes go
Until a marble stair they come unto,
And thereby mount into a pillared place,
At end whereof, upon an open space
Hung o'er the beach, that fire shall they see
That lighted you to finish gloriously
Your glorious journey ; and beside the fire
There shall they find the slayer of thy sire,
Who, soothly, shall not flee from them to-day,
Nor curse the men who carry him away."

Then forth Menoetius and Nauphius stood,
Lynceus the keen, and Alpheus of the wood,
To do the thing that she would have them do,
While unto Argo did Medea go,
And for the last time scaled the sea-beat side ;
There 'midst her silken curtains did she hide,
And taking forth the fairest weed she had,
In many a fragrant fold her body clad,
And on her feet bound golden sandals fair,
And set a golden garland on her hair.

But when again she reached the shell-strewn sand
She saw the shielded heroes wondering stand
About the new-slain body of the king,
Not knowing yet whose hands had wrought the thing.
For, scared amid their woe and misery
By clash of arms, the wretched sisters three
Were lurking yet within the undercroft,

Amongst the close-set pillars, thinking oft
That now the whole round world should be undone.

But while they trembled, Æson's glorious son
Bade men make onward toward the market-place,
That there he might the wondering townsfolk face
For war or peace whichever it might be ;
But first upon a great oar carefully
They bound a spar crosswise, and hung thereon
That guarded marvel that their arms had won,
And as a banner bore it well aloft.
And fair Medea, upon cushions soft,
Laid upon spear-staves did they bear along,
Hedged round with glittering spears and bucklers strong,
And unarmed, fearless, mighty Jason led
Their joyous march, next whom, the man just dead,
The strong-armed heroes upon spear-shafts bore,
With dark blue sea-cloaks deftly covered o'er.
So, following up the poor unkingly bier
Of him who erst, for love of gain and fear,
Had sent them forth to what he deemed their end,
They through the palace courts began to wend,
Not stayed of any, since the guards indeed
Still slept, made heavy by the drowsy weed
Eradne in their wine erewhile did steep.
And other folk, just risen from their sleep,
Looked from the windows 'mazed ; and like a dream
The queen enthroned on golden cloths did seem,
And like a dream the high-raised, glittering Fleece,
And that new-slain long-hated pest of Greece.
And some indeed there were who saw full well
What wondrous tale there would be now to tell ;
Who the glad setting forth did not forget,
Unto whose eyes more fair, more glorious yet
The heroes showed, than when the sunny bay
First felt their keel upon a happy day.
They, crying out for joy, beheld the Fleece,
And that fair Helper who had saved for Greece

The godlike heroes, and amidst of these
Seemed not the least of heavenly Goddesses.

Withal they reached at last the brazen gate
Of Æson's house, outside of which did wait
Men armed and shouting, for that dawn a man
None knew, a fisher on the water wan,
From house to house among the folk had gone,
Who said, that being in his boat alone,
Casting his nets a little time before
The dawn, he heard the sound of many an oar,
And looking round, beheld a glittering prow
That he for Argo's armed beak did know ;
And as he gazed, her many-coloured side
Dashed past him like a dream with flood of tide,
As for the far-off ancient fane she made ;
And that thereon his anchor straight he weighed,
And made good haste the landing-place to gain.
" For certes," said he, " Pelias is slain,
And we are free once more." So saying, he passed
From house to house, and reached the gates at last ;
Nor any saw him more on land or sea,
And, certes, none but clear-voiced Mercury
Spoke in that man by helpful Juno made,
No body, soothly, but a hollow shade.

Now, therefore, when the gates were open wide,
Shouting, the folk drew back on either side,
All wild with joy ; but when they did behold
The high-raised Fleece of curling ruddy gold,
And the glad heroes' mighty heads beneath,
And throned Medea, with her golden wreath,
And folded hands, and chiefest thing of all,
The godlike man who went beside the pall,
Whereon the body of their tyrant lay,
Then did their voices fail them on that day,
And many a man of weeping there was fain.

At last did Jason set his foot again
Upon the steps of that same ivory throne
Where once he fronted Pelias all alone,

And bare of friends : but now he turned about,
And, 'mid the thunder of the people's shout,
Scarce heard his fellows' spears : and by his side
There stood his gold-adorned Colchian bride,
With glad tears glistening in her sweet grey eyes :
And dead, at end of foiled treacheries,
There lay his foe, the slayer of his kin.

Then did he clasp the hand that lay within
His mighty and sword-hardened fingers brown,
And cried aloud above the shouting town :—

“ Tell me, O people of my father's land,
Before whose ivory well-wrought throne I stand,
And whose fair-towered house mine eyes behold,
Glittering with brazen pillars, rich with gold ?

“ A while ago we sailed across the sea,
To meet our deaths, if so the thing must be,
And there had died, had not the kind Gods been,
Who sent to us this lovely Colchian queen
To be our helper : many a land we saw
That knoweth neither tongue of man, or law
Of God or man : oft most things did we lack
That most men have, as still we struggled back
Unto the soft wind and the Grecian sea,
Until this morn our keel triumphantly
Furrowed the green waves of the well-known bay.
There to yon palace did I take my way,
As one who thought his father's face to see ;
Yet landing on the green shore warily
(Since times may change, and friendship come to nought),
To this dead man straightway my feet were brought,
Whose face I knew, the face of Pelias.

“ Then still more warily thence did we pass,
Till we met folk who told us everything,
Both of the slaying of the godlike king,
Æson, my father, and of other folk,
And how the whole land groaned beneath the yoke

Of this dead man, whom sure the Gods have slain
That all our labour might not be in vain,
Nor we, safe passing through the deadly land,
Lie slain in our own country at his hand.
So have the Gods wrought, therefore am I here,
No shield upon mine arm, no glittering spear
In my right hand, but by my unarmed side
This Colchian queen, by many sorrows tried.
Therefore, no fear of you is in my heart,
And if ye will, henceforth will I depart,
Nor take mine own ; or if it please this town
To slay me, let them lay my dead corpse down,
As on his tomb my father's image lies,
Like what he was before these miseries
Fell on his head. But in no wise will I
Take seat beneath this golden canopy,
Before ye tell me, people of this land,
Whose throne this is before the which I stand,
Whose towered house this is mine eyes behold,
Girt round with brazen pillars, bright with gold."

Then, ere he ceased, the people's shouts broke in
Upon his speech : " Most glorious of thy kin !
Be thou our king—be thou our king alone,
That we may think the age of iron gone,
And Saturn come with every peaceful thing :—
Jason for king ! the Conqueror for king ! "

Therewith the heroes clashed their spears and shields,
And as within the many-flowered fields
This way and that the slim-stalked flowers bend,
When sweeping gusts the soft west wind doth send
Among their hosts, so moved the people then,
When ceased the shouting of the armed men,
For each unto the other 'gan to speak,
And o'er the tall men's heads some dame would seek
To raise her child to look upon the king.
And as with smiles and laughter many a thing
They chattered through the great square joyously,
Each careless what his neighbour's words might be,

It sounded like some February mead,
Where thick the lusted starlings creep and feed,
And each his own song sings unto his mate,
Chiding the fickle spring so cold and late.

But through the happy clamour of the folk,
At Jason's bidding, the great trumpet broke,
And great Echion's voice rang clear and strong,
As he cried silence ; then across the throng,
Did Jason cry : " O people, thanked be ye,
That in such wise ye give yourselves to me.
And now, O friends, what more is there to say
But this ? Be glad, and feast this happy day,
Nor spend one coin of your store for this ;
Nor shall the altars of the high Gods miss
Their due thank-offering : and She chief of all,
Who caused that this same happy time should fall,
Shall have a tithe of all that 'longs to me.

" And ye, O loved companions o'er the sea,
Come to my golden house, and let us feast,
Nor let time weary us this night at least ;
O ! be so glad that this our happy day
For all times past, all times to come may pay."

He ceased, and one more shout the people sent
Up to the heavens, as he descending went
With the fair Colchian through the joyous folk,
From whose well-ordered lane at times there broke
Some little child, thrust forward well to see
The godlike leader of the Minyæ ;
Or here and there forth would some young man lean
To gaze upon the beauty of the queen
A little nearer, as they passed him by.

Then, in such guise, they went triumphantly
To all the temples of that city fair,
And royal gifts they gave the great Gods there,
But chiefest from the Queen of Heaven's close
The clouds of incense in the air uprose,
And chiefly thither were the white lambs led,

And there the longest, Jason bowed the head
Well garlanded with lily flowers white.
But She, when all these things were done aright,
And Jason now had turned to go away,
In midmost of that cloudless sunny day
Bade Iris build her many-coloured bow,
That She her favour to the king might show.

Then still more did the royal man rejoice,
And o'er the people, lifting up his voice,
Cried : " See, Thessalians, who is on my side,
Nor fear ye now but plenty will abide
In your fair land, and all folk speak of it,
From places whence the wavering swallows flit,
That they may live with us the sweet half year,
To lands where dwells the sluggish white-felled bear."

So spake he, glad past words ; and for the rest
Did Juno love him well since his great quest
Had brought home bitter death on Pelias,
And his love's words had brought the thing to pass,
That o'er that head was hanging, since the day
When from Sidero dead he turned away,
And as with Neleus down the steps he trod,
Thought things that fitted some undying God.

Thence to his father's tomb did Jason go,
And found the old man's body laid alow,
Within a lone, unkingly grave, and bade
That straightway should a royal tomb be made
To lay him in, anigh the murmuring sea,
Where, celebrating their great victory,
They might do honour to his head recrowned,
And 'mid their shouts all mourning might be drowned,
Nor gladden the slain Pelias' lonely shade
By weeping o'er the slaughter he had made.

Therefrom unto his own house Jason came,
He had not entered since the night his name
Rang 'twixt the marble walls triumphantly,
And all folk set their hearts upon the sea.

So, now again, when shadows 'gan to fall
Still longer from the west, within that hall
Once more the heroes sat above their wine,
Once more they hearkened music nigh divine,
Once more the maidens' flower-scattering hands
Seemed better prizes than well-peopled lands.

Glorious and royal, now the deed was done,
Seemed in that hall the face of every one,
Who, 'twixt the thin plank and the bubbling sea,
Had pulled the smooth oar-handle past his knee.
Tuneful each voice seemed as the heroes told
The marvels that their eyes did erst behold,
Unto some merchant of the goodly town,
Or some rich man who on the thymy down
Fed store of sheep, and in whose lush green mead
The heavy-uddered cows were wont to feed.

And she who all this world of joy had made,
And dared so many things all unafraid,
Now sat a Queen beside her crowned King.
And as his love increased with everything
She did or said, forgot her happy state
In Æa of old times, ere mighty fate
Brought Argo's side from out the clashers twain.
Betwixt the rainbow and the briny rain.
Yet in the midst of her felicity
She trembled lest another day should see
Another fate, and other deeds for these,
Who hailed her not the least of Goddesses.

Yet surely now, if nevermore again,
Had she and all these folk forgotten pain,
And idle words to them were Death and Fear;
For in the gathering evening could they hear
The carols of the glad folk through the town,
The song of birds within the garden drown;
And when the golden sun had gone away,
Still little darker was the night than day
Without the windows of the goodly hall.

But many an hour after night did fall,
Though outside, silence fell on man and beast,
There still they sat, nor wearied of the feast ;
Yea, ere they parted glimmering light had come
From the far mountains, nigh the Colchian's home,
And in the twilight birds began to wake.

But the next morn, for slaughtered Æson's sake
The games began, with many a sacrifice,
And, these being all accomplished, gifts of price
The heroes took at Jason's open hands,
And, going homewards, unto many lands
They bore the story of their wandering.

And now is Jason mighty lord and king,
And wedded to the fairest queen on earth,
And with no trouble now to break his mirth ;
And, loved by all, lives happy, free from blame,
Nor less has won the promised meed of fame.
So, having everything he once desired
Within the wild, ere yet his heart was fired
By Juno's word, he lives an envied man,
Having these things that scarce another can,
Ease, love, and fame, and youth that knows no dread
Of any horrors lurking far ahead
Across the sunny, flowered fields of life :—
—Youth seeing no end unto the joyous strife.

And thus in happy days, and rest, and peace,
Here ends the winning of the Golden Fleece.

THREE TALES FROM
THE EARTHLY PARADISE

ATALANTA'S RACE

ARGUMENT

Atalanta, daughter of King Schoeneus, not willing to lose her virgin's estate, made it a law to all suitors that they should run a race with her in the public place, and if they failed to overcome her should die unrevenged ; and thus many brave men perished. At last came Milanion, the son of Amphidamas, who, outrunning her with the help of Venus, gained the virgin and wedded her.

THROUGH thick Arcadian woods a hunter went,
Following the beasts up, on a fresh spring day ;
But since his horn-tipped bow but seldom bent,
Now at the noontide nought had happed to slay,
Within a vale he called his hounds away,
Hearkening the echoes of his lone voice cling
About the cliffs and through the beech-trees ring.

But when they ended, still awhile he stood,
And but the sweet familiar thrush could hear,
And all the day-long noises of the wood,
And o'er the dry leaves of the vanished year
His hounds' feet pattering as they drew anear,
And heavy breathing from their heads low hung,
To see the mighty cornel bow unstrung.

Then smiling did he turn to leave the place,
But with his first step some new fleeting thought
A shadow cast across his sun-burnt face ;
I think the golden net that April brought

From some warm world his wavering soul had caught ;
For, sunk in vague sweet longing, did he go
Betwixt the trees with doubtful steps and slow.

Yet howsoever slow he went, at last
The trees grew sparser, and the wood was done ;
Whereon one farewell, backward look he cast,
Then, turning round to see what place was won,
With shaded eyes looked underneath the sun,
And o'er green meads and new-turned furrows brown
Beheld the gleaming of King Schœneus' town.

So thitherward he turned, and on each side
The folk were busy on the teeming land,
And man and maid from the brown furrows cried,
Or midst the newly-blossomed vines did stand,
And as the rustic weapon pressed the hand
Thought of the nodding of the well-filled ear,
Or how the knife the heavy bunch should shear.

Merry it was : about him sung the birds,
The spring flowers bloomed along the firm dry road,
The sleek-skinned mothers of the sharp-horned herds
Now for the barefoot milking-maidens lowed ;
While from the freshness of his blue abode,
Glad his death-bearing arrows to forget,
The broad sun blazed, nor scattered plagues as yet.

Through such fair things unto the gates he came,
And found them open, as though peace were there ;
Wherethrough, unquestioned of his race or name,
He entered, and along the streets 'gan fare,
Which at the first of folk were well-nigh bare ;
But pressing on, and going more hastily,
Men hurrying too he 'gan at last to see.

Following the last of these, he still pressed on,
Until an open space he came unto,

Where wreaths of fame had oft been lost and won,
For feats of strength folk there were wont to do.
And now our hunter looked for something new,
Because the whole wide space was bare, and stilled
The high seats were, with eager people filled.

There with the others to a seat he gat,
Whence he beheld a broidered canopy,
'Neath which in fair array King Schoeneus sat
Upon his throne with councillors thereby ;
And underneath his well-wrought seat and high,
He saw a golden image of the sun,
A silver image of the Fleet-foot One.

A brazen altar stood beneath their feet
Whereon a thin flame flickered in the wind ; .
Nigh this a herald clad in raiment meet
Made ready even now his horn to wind,
By whom a huge man held a sword, entwined
With yellow flowers ; these stood a little space
From off the altar, nigh the starting place.

And there two runners did the sign abide
Foot set to foot,—a young man slim and fair,
Crisp-haired, well knit, with firm limbs often tried
In places where no man his strength may spare ;
Dainty his thin coat was, and on his hair
A golden circlet of renown he wore,
And in his hand an olive garland bore.

But on this day with whom shall he contend ?
A maid stood by him like Diana clad
When in the woods she lists her bow to bend,
Too fair for one to look on and be glad,
Who scarcely yet has thirty summers had,
If he must still behold her from afar ;
Too fair to let the world live free from war.

She seemed all earthly matters to forget ;
Of all tormenting lines her face was clear,
Her wide grey eyes upon the goal were set
Calm and unmoved as though no soul were near,
But her foe trembled as a man in fear,
Nor from her loveliness one moment turned
His anxious face with fierce desire that burned.

Now through the hush there broke the trumpet's clang
Just as the setting sun made eventide.
Then from light feet a spurt of dust there sprang,
And swiftly were they running side by side ;
But silent did the thronging folk abide
Until the turning-post was reached at last,
And round about it still abreast they passed.

But when the people saw how close they ran,
When halfway to the starting-point they were,
A cry of joy broke forth, whereat the man
Headed the white-foot runner, and drew near
Unto the very end of all his fear ;
And scarce his straining feet the ground could feel,
And bliss unhopd for o'er his heart 'gan steal.

But midst the loud victorious shouts he heard
Her footsteps drawing nearer, and the sound
Of fluttering raiment, and thereat afeard
His flushed and eager face he turned around,
And even then he felt her past him bound
Fleet as the wind, but scarcely saw her there
Till on the goal she laid her fingers fair.

There stood she breathing like a little child
Amid some warlike clamour laid asleep,
For no victorious joy her red lips smiled,
Her cheek its wonted freshness did but keep ;
No glance lit up her clear grey eyes and deep,
Though some divine thought softened all her face
As once more rang the trumpet through the place.

But her late foe stopped short amidst his course,
One moment gazed upon her piteously,
Then with a groan his lingering feet did force
To leave the spot whence he her eyes could see ;
And, changed like one who knows his time must be
But short and bitter, without any word
He knelt before the bearer of the sword ;

Then high rose up the gleaming deadly blade,
Bared of its flowers, and through the crowded place
Was silence now, and midst of it the maid
Went by the poor wretch at a gentle pace,
And he to hers upturned his sad white face :
Nor did his eyes behold another sight
Ere on his soul there fell eternal night.

So was the pageant ended, and all folk
Talking of this and that familiar thing
In little groups from that sad concourse broke,
For now the shrill bats were upon the wing,
And soon dark night would slay the evening,
And in dark gardens sang the nightingale
Her little-heeded, oft-repeated tale.

And with the last of all the hunter went,
Who, wondering at the strange sight he had seen,
Prayed an old man to tell him what it meant,
Both why the vanquished man so slain had been,
And if the maiden were an earthly queen,
Or rather what much more she seemed to be,
No sharer in the world's mortality.

"Stranger," said he, "I pray she soon may die
Whose lovely youth has slain so many an one !
King Schoeneus' daughter is she verily,
Who when her eyes first looked upon the sun.

Was fain to end her life but new begun,
For he had vowed to leave but men alone
Sprung from his loins when he from earth was gone.

“ Therefore he bade one leave her in the wood,
And let wild things deal with her as they might,
But this being done, some cruel god thought good
To save her beauty in the world's despite :
Folk say that her, so delicate and white
As now she is, a rough root-grubbing bear
Amidst her shapeless cubs at first did rear.

“ In course of time the woodfolk slew her nurse,
And to their rude abode the youngling brought,
And reared her up to be a kingdom's curse,
Who grown a woman, of no kingdom thought,
But armed and swift, 'mid beasts destruction wrought,
Nor spared two shaggy centaur kings to slay
To whom her body seemed an easy prey.

“ So to this city, led by fate, she came
Whom known by signs, whereof I cannot tell,
King Schœneus for his child at last did claim,
Nor elsewhere since that day doth she dwell
Sending too many a noble soul to hell—
What ! thine eyes glisten ! what then, thinkest thou
Her shining head unto the yoke to bow ?

“ Listen, my son, and love some other maid,
For she the saffron gown will never wear,
And on no flower-strewn couch shall she be laid,
Nor shall her voice make glad a lover's eye :
Yet if of Death thou hast not any fear,
Yea, rather, if thou lovest him utterly,
Thou still may'st woo her ere thou com'st to die,

“ Like him that on this day thou sawest lie dead ;
For, fearing as I deem the Sea-born One,

The maid has vowed e'en such a man to wed
As in the course her swift feet can outrun,
But whoso fails herein, his days are done :
He came the nighest that was slain to-day,
Although with him I deem she did but play.

“ Behold, such mercy Atalanta gives
To those that long to win her loveliness ;
Be wise ! be sure that many a maid there lives
Gentler than she, of beauty little less,
Whose swimming eyes thy loving words shall bless,
When in some garden, knee set close to knee,
Thou sing'st the song that love may teach to thee.”

So to the hunter spake that ancient man,
And left him for his own home presently :
But he turned round, and through the moonlight wan
Reached the thick wood, and there 'twixt tree and tree
Distraught he passed the long night feverishly,
'Twixt sleep and waking, and at dawn arose
To wage hot war against his speechless foes.

There to the hart's flank seemed his shaft to grow,
As panting down the broad green glades he flew,
There by his horn the Dryads well might know
His thrust against the bear's heart had been true,
And there Adonis' bane his javelin slew,
But still in vain through rough and smooth he went
For none the more his restlessness was spent.

So wandering, he to Argive cities came,
And in the lists with valiant men he stood,
And by great deeds he won him praise and fame,
And heaps of wealth for little-valued blood ;
But none of all these things, or life, seemed good
Unto his heart, where still unsatisfied
A ravenous longing warred with fear and pride.

Therefore it happed when but a month had gone
Since he had left King Schoeneus' city old,
In hunting-gear again, again alone
The forest-bordered meads did he behold,
Where still mid thoughts of August's quivering gold
Folk hoed the wheat, and clipped the vine in trust
Of faint October's purple-foaming must.

And once again he passed the peaceful gate,
While to his beating heart his lips did lie,
That owning not victorious love and fate,
Said, half aloud, " And here too must I try,
To win of alien men the mastery,
And gather for my head fresh meed of fame
And cast new glory on my father's name."

In spite of that, how beat his heart when first
Folk said to him, " And art thou come to see
That which still makes our city's name accurst
Among all mothers for its cruelty?
Then know indeed that fate is good to thee
Because to-morrow a new luckless one
Against the whitefoot maid is pledged to run."

So on the morrow with no curious eyes
As once he did, that piteous sight he saw,
Nor did that wonder in his heart arise
As toward the goal the conquering maid 'gan draw,
Nor did he gaze upon her eyes with awe,
Too full the pain of longing filled his heart
For fear or wonder there to have a part.

But O, how long the night was ere it went !
How long it was before the dawn begun
Showed to the wakening birds the sun's intent
That not in darkness should the world be done !
And then, and then, how long before the sun
Bade silently the toilers of the earth
Get forth to fruitless cares or empty mirth !

And long it seemed that in the market-place
He stood and saw the chaffering folk go by,
Ere from the ivory throne King Schœneus' face
Looked down upon the murmur royally,
But then came trembling that the time was nigh
When he midst pitying looks his love must claim,
And jeering voices must salute his name.

But as the throng he pierced to gain the throne,
His alien face distraught and anxious told
What hopeless errand he was bound upon,
And, each to each, folk whispered to behold
His godlike limbs ; nay, and one woman old
As he went by must pluck him by the sleeve
And pray him yet that wretched love to leave.

For sidling up she said, " Canst thou live twice,
Fair son ? canst thou have joyful youth again,
That thus thou goest to the sacrifice
Thyself the victim ? nay then, all in vain
Thy mother bore her longing and her pain
And one more maiden on the earth must dwell
Hopeless of joy, nor fearing death and hell.

" O, fool, thou knowest not the compact then
That with the three-formed goddess she has made
To keep her from the loving lips of men,
And in no saffron gown to be arrayed,
And therewithal with glory to be paid,
And love of her the moonlit river sees
White 'gainst the shadow of the formless trees.

" Come back, and I myself will pray for thee
Unto the sea-born framer of delights,
To give thee her who on the earth may be
The fairest stirrer up to death and fights,
To quench with hopeful days and joyous nights
The flame that doth thy youthful heart consume :
Come back, nor give thy beauty to the tomb."

How should he listen to her earnest speech ?
Words, such as he not once or twice had said
Unto himself, whose meaning scarce could reach
The firm abode of that sad hardihead—
He turned about, and through the marketstead
Swiftly he passed, until before the throne
In the cleared space he stood at last alone.

Then said the King, " Stranger, what dost thou here ?
Have any of my folk done ill to thee ?
Or art thou of the forest men in fear ?
Or art thou of the sad fraternity
Who still will strive my daughter's mates to be,
Staking their lives to win to earthly bliss
The lonely maid, the friend of Artemis ? "

" O King," he said, " thou sayest the word indeed ;
Nor will I quit the strife till I have won
My sweet delight, or death to end my need.
And know that I am called Milanion,
Of King Amphidamas the well-loved son :
So fear not that to thy old name, O King,
Much loss or shame my victory will bring."

" Nay, Prince," said Schoeneus, " welcome to this land
Thou wert indeed, if thou wert here to try
Thy strength 'gainst some one mighty of his hand ;
Nor would we grudge thee well-won mastery.
But now, why wilt thou come to me to die,
And at my door lay down thy luckless head,
Swelling the band of the unhappy dead,

" Whose curses even now my heart doth fear ?
Lo, I am old, and know what life can be,
And what a bitter thing is death anear.
O Son ! be wise, and hearken unto me,
And if no other can be dear to thee,
At least as now, yet is the world full wide,
And bliss in seeming hopeless hearts may hide :

"But if thou lovest life, then all is lost."
"Nay, King," Milanion said, "thy words are vain.
Doubt not that I have counted well the cost.
But say, on what day wilt thou that I gain
Fulfilled delight, or death to end my pain?
Right glad were I if it could be to-day,
And all my doubts at rest for ever lay."

"Nay," said King Schoeneus, "thus it shall not be,
But rather shalt thou let a month go by,
And weary with thy prayers for victory
What god thou know'st the kindest and most nigh.
So doing, still perchance thou shalt not die:
And with my goodwill wouldst thou have the maid,
For of the equal gods I grow afraid."

"And until then, O Prince, be thou my guest,
And all these troublous things awhile forget."
"Nay," said he, "couldst thou give my soul good rest,
And on mine head a sleepy garland set,
Then had I 'scaped the meshes of the net,
Nor shouldst thou hear from me another word;
But now, make sharp thy fearful heading sword."

"Yet will I do what son of man may do,
And promise all the gods may most desire,
That to myself I may at least be true;
And on that day my heart and limbs so tire,
With utmost strain and measureless desire,
That, at the worst, I may but fall asleep
When in the sunlight round that sword shall sweep."

He went with that, nor anywhere would bide,
But unto Argos restlessly did wend;
And there, as one who lays all hope aside,
Because the leech has said his life must end,
Silent farewell he bade to foe and friend,

And took his way unto the restless sea,
For there he deemed his rest and help might be.

UPON the shore of Argolis there stands
A temple to the goddess that he sought,
That, turned unto the lion-bearing lands,
Fenced from the east, of cold winds hath no thought,
Though to no homestead there the sheaves are brought,
No groaning press torments the close-clipped murk,
Lonely the fane stands, far from all men's work.

Pass through a close, set thick with myrtle-trees,
Through the brass doors that guard the holy place,
And entering, hear the washing of the seas
That twice a day rise high above the base,
And with the south-west urging them, embrace
The marble feet of her that standeth there
That shrink not, naked though they be and fair.

Small is the fane through which the seawind sings
About Queen Venus' well-wrought image white,
But hung around are many precious things,
The gifts of those who, longing for delight,
Have hung them there within the goddess' sight,
And in return have taken at her hands
The living treasures of the Grecian lands.

And thither now has come Milanion,
And showed unto the priests' wide open eyes
Gifts fairer than all those that there have shone,
Silk cloths, inwrought with Indian fantasies,
And bowls inscribed with sayings of the wise
Above the deeds of foolish living things,
And mirrors fit to be the gifts of kings.

And now before the Sea-born One he stands,
By the sweet veiling smoke made dim and soft,

And while the incense trickles from his hands,
And while the odorous smoke-wreaths hang aloft,
Thus doth he pray to her : " O thou, who oft
Hast holpen man and maid in their distress,
Despise me not for this my wretchedness !

" O goddess, among us who dwell below,
Kings and great men, great for a little while,
Have pity on the lowly heads that bow,
Nor hate the hearts that love them without guile ;
Wilt thou be worse than these, and is thy smile
A vain device of him who set thee here,
An empty dream of some artificer ?

" O, great one, some men love, and are ashamed,
Some men are weary of the bonds of love ;
Yea, and by some men lightly art thou blamed,
That from thy toils their lives they cannot move,
And 'mid the ranks of men their manhood prove.
Alas ! O goddess, if thou slayest me
What new immortal can I serve but thee ?

" Think then, will it bring honour to thy head
If folk say, ' Everything aside he cast
And to all fame and honour was he dead,
And to his one hope now is dead at last,
Since all unholpen he is gone and past :
Ah, the gods love not man, for certainly,
He to his helper did not cease to cry.'

" Nay, but thou wilt help ; they who died before
Not single-hearted as I deem came here,
Therefore unthanked they laid their gifts before
Thy stainless feet, still shivering with their fear,
Lest in their eyes their true thought might appear,
Who sought to be the lords of that fair town,
Dreaded of men and winners of renown.

“ O Queen, thou knowest I pray not for this :
O set us down together in some place
Where not a voice can break our heaven of bliss,
Where nought but rocks and I can see her face,
Softening beneath the marvel of thy grace,
Where not a foot our vanished steps can track—
The golden age, the golden age come back !

“ O fairest, hear me now who do thy will,
Plead for thy rebel that he be not slain,
But live and love and be thy servant still ;
Ah, give her joy and take away my pain,
And thus two long-enduring servants gain.
An easy thing this is to do for me,
What need of my vain words to weary thee !

“ But none the less, this place will I not leave
Until I needs must go my death to meet,
Or at thy hands some happy sign receive
That in great joy we twain may one day greet
Thy presence here and kiss thy silver feet,
Such as we deem thee, fair beyond all words,
Victorious o’er our servants and our lords.”

Then from the altar back a space he drew,
But from the Queen turned not his face away,
But ’gainst a pillar leaned, until the blue
That arched the sky, at ending of the day,
Was turned to ruddy gold and changing grey,
And clear, but low, the nigh-ebbed windless sea
In the still evening murmured ceaselessly.

And there he stood when all the sun was down,
Nor had he moved when the dim golden light,
Like the far lustre of a godlike town,
Had left the world to seeming hopeless night,
Nor would he move the more when wan moonlight
Streamed through the pillars for a little while,
And lighted up the white Queen’s changeless smile.

Nought noted he the shallow flowing sea
As step by step it set the wrack a-swim,
The yellow torchlight nothing noted he
Wherein with fluttering gown and half-bared limb
The temple damsels sung their midnight hymn,
And nought the doubled stillness of the fane
When they were gone and all was hushed again.

But when the waves had touched the marble base,
And steps the fish swim over twice a-day,
The dawn beheld him sunken in his place
Upon the floor ; and sleeping there he lay,
Not heeding aught the little jets of spray
The roughened sea brought nigh, across him cast,
For as one dead all thought from him had passed.

Yet long before the sun had showed his head,
Long ere the varied hangings on the wall
Had gained once more their blue and green and red,
He rose as one some well-known sign doth call
When war upon the city's gates doth fall,
And scarce like one fresh risen out of sleep,
He 'gan again his broken watch to keep.

Then he turned round ; not for the sea-gull's cry
That wheeled above the temple in his flight,
Not for the fresh south wind that lovingly
Breathed on the new-born day and dying night,
But some strange hope 'twixt fear and great delight
Drew round his face, now flushed, now pale and wan,
And still constrained his eyes the sea to scan.

Now a faint light lit up the southern sky,
Not sun or moon, for all the world was grey,
But this a bright cloud seemed, that drew anigh,
Lighting the dull waves that beneath it lay
As toward the temple still it took its way,
And still grew greater, till Milanion
Saw nought for dazzling light that round him shone.

But as he staggered with his arms outspread,
Delicious unnamed odours breathed around
For languid happiness he bowed his head,
And with wet eyes sank down upon the ground,
Nor wished for aught, nor any dream he found
To give him reason for that happiness,
Or make him ask more knowledge of his bliss.

At last his eyes were cleared, and he could see
Through happy tears the goddess face to face
With that faint image of Divinity,
Whose well-wrought smile and dainty changeless grace
Until that morn so gladdened all the place ;
Then he unwitting cried aloud her name
And covered up his eyes for fear and shame.

But through the stillness he her voice could hear
Piercing his heart with joy scarce bearable,
That said, " Milanion, wherefore dost thou fear,
I am not hard to those who love me well ;
List to what I a second time will tell,
And thou mayest hear perchance, and live to save
The cruel maiden from a loveless grave.

" See, by my feet three golden apples lie—
Such fruit among the heavy roses falls,
Such fruit my watchful damsels carefully
Store up within the best loved of my walls,
Ancient Damascus, where the lover calls,
Above my unseen head, and faint and light
The rose-leaves flutter round me in the night.

" And note, that these are not alone most fair
With heavenly gold, but longing strange they bring
Unto the hearts of men, who will not care,
Beholding these, for any once-loved thing
Till round the shining sides their fingers cling.
And thou shalt see thy well-girt swiftfoot maid
By sight of these amid her glory stayed.

" For bearing these within a scrip with thee,
When first she heads thee from the starting-place
Cast down the first one for her eyes to see,
And when she turns aside make on apace,
And if again she heads thee in the race
Spare not the other two to cast aside
If she not long enough behind will bide.

" Farewell, and when has come the happy time
That she Diana's raiment must unbind
And all the world seems blessed with Saturn's clime,
And thou with eager arms about her twined
Beholdest first her grey eyes growing kind,
Surely, O trembler, thou shalt scarcely then
Forget the Helper of unhappy men."

Milanion raised his head at this last word,
For now so soft and kind she seemed to be
No longer of her Godhead was he feared ;
Too late he looked, for nothing could he see
But the white image glimmering doubtfully
In the departing twilight cold and grey,
And those three apples on the steps that lay.

These then he caught up quivering with delight,
Yet fearful lest it all might be a dream,
And though weary with the watchful night,
And sleepless nights of longing, still did deem
He could not sleep ; but yet the first sunbeam
That smote the fane across the heaving deep
Shone on him laid in calm untroubled sleep.

But little ere the noontide did he rise,
And why he felt so happy scarce could tell
Until the gleaming apples met his eyes.
Then leaving the fair place where this befell
Oft he looked back as one who loved it well,

Then homeward to the haunts of men 'gan wend
To bring all things unto a happy end.

Now has the lingering month at last gone by,
Again are all folk round the running place,
Nor other seems the dismal pageantry
Than heretofore, but that another face
Looks o'er the smooth course ready for the race,
For now, beheld of all, Milanion
Stands on the spot he twice has looked upon.

But yet—what change is this that holds the maid ?
Does she indeed see in his glittering eye
More than disdain of the sharp shearing blade,
Some happy hope of help and victory ?
The others seemed to say, " We come to die,
Look down upon us for a little while,
That dead, we may bethink us of thy smile."

But he—what look of mastery was this
He cast on her ? why were his lips so red ?
Why was his face so flushed with happiness ?
So looks not one who deems himself but dead,
E'en if to death he bows a willing head ;
So rather looks a god well pleased to find
Some earthly damsel fashioned to his mind.

Why must she drop her lids before his gaze,
And even as she casts adown her eyes
Redden to note his eager glance of praise,
And wish that she were clad in other guise ?
Why must the memory to her heart arise
Of things unnoticed when they first were heard,
Some lover's song, some answering maiden's word ?

What makes these longings, vague, without a name,
And this vain pity never felt before,

This sudden languor, this contempt of fame,
This tender sorrow for the time past o'er,
These doubts that grow each minute more and more ?
Why does she tremble as the time grows near,
And weak defeat and woeful victory fear ?

But while she seemed to hear her beating heart,
Above their heads the trumpet blast rang out
And forth they sprang ; and she must play her part.
Then flew her white feet, knowing not a doubt,
Though slackening once, she turned her head about,
But then she cried aloud and faster fled
Than e'er before, and all men deemed him dead.

But with no sound he raised aloft his hand,
And thence what seemed a ray of light there flew
And past the maid rolled on along the sand ;
Then trembling she her feet together drew
And in her heart a strong desire there grew
To have the toy ; some god she thought had given
That gift to her, to make of earth a heaven.

Then from the course with eager steps she ran,
And in her odorous bosom laid the gold.
But when she turned again, the great-limbed man
Now well ahead she failed not to behold,
And mindful of her glory waxing cold,
Sprang up and followed him in hot pursuit,
Though with one hand she touched the golden fruit.

Note too, the bow that she was wont to bear
She laid aside to grasp the glittering prize,
And o'er her shoulder from the quiver fair
Three arrows fell and lay before her eyes
Unnoticed, as amidst the people's cries
She sprang to head the strong Milanion,
Who now the turning-post had well-nigh won.

But as he set his mighty hand on it
White fingers underneath his own were laid,
And white limbs from his dazzled eyes did flit,
Then he the second fruit cast by the maid,
But she ran on awhile, then as afraid
Wavered and stopped, and turned and made no stay,
Until the globe with its bright fellow lay.

Then, as a troubled glance she cast around
Now far ahead the Argive could she see,
And in her garment's hem one hand she wound
To keep the double prize, and strenuously
Sped o'er the course, and little doubt had she
To win the day, though now but scanty space
Was left betwixt him and the winning place.

Short was the way unto such winged feet,
Quickly she gained upon him till at last
He turned about her eager eyes to meet
And from his hand the third fair apple cast.
She wavered not, but turned and ran so fast
After the prize that should her bliss fulfil,
That in her hand it lay ere it was still.

Nor did she rest, but turned about to win
Once more, an unblest woeful victory—
And yet—and yet—why does her breath begin
To fail her, and her feet drag heavily?
Why fails she now to see if far or nigh
The goal is? why do her grey eyes grow dim?
Why do these tremors run through every limb?

She spreads her arms abroad some stay to find
Else must she fall, indeed, and findeth this,
A strong man's arms about her body twined,
Nor may she shudder now to feel his kiss,
So wrapped she is in new unbroken bliss:

Made happy that the foe the prize hath won,
She weeps glad tears for all her glory done.

SHATTER the trumpet, hew adown the posts !
Upon the brazen altar break the sword,
And scatter incense to appease the ghosts
Of those who died here by their own award.
Bring forth the image of the mighty Lord,
And her who unseen o'er the runners hung,
And did a deed for ever to be sung.

Here are the gathered folk, make no delay,
Open King Schœneus' well-filled treasury,
Bring out the gifts long hid from light of day,
The golden bowls o'erwrought with imagery,
Gold chains, and unguents brought from over sea,
The saffron gown the old Phœnician brought,
Within the temple of the Goddess wrought.

O ye, O damsels, who shall never see
Her, that Love's servant bringeth now to you,
Returning from another victory,
In some cool bower do all that now is due !
Since she in token of her service new
Shall give to Venus offerings rich enow,
Her maiden zone, her arrows, and her bow.

So when his last word's echo died away,
The growing wind at end of that wild day
Alone they heard, for silence bound them all ;
Yea, on their hearts a weight had seemed to fall,
As unto the scarce-hoped felicity
The tale drew round—the end of life so nigh,
The aim so little, and the joy so vain—
For as a child's unmeasured joy brings pain
Unto a grown man holding grief at bay,
So the old fervent story of that day
Brought pain half-sweet, to these : till now the fire
Upon the hearth sent up a flickering spire
Of ruddy flame, as fell the burned-through logs,
And, waked by sudden silence, grey old dogs,
The friends of this or that man, rose and fawned
On hands they knew ; withal once more there dawned
The light of common day on those old hearts,
And all were ready now to play their parts,
And take what feeble joy might yet remain
In place of all they once had hoped to gain

INTERLUDE

Now on the second day that these did meet
March was a-dying through soft days and sweet,
Too hopeful for the wild days yet to be ;
But in the hall that ancient company,
Not lacking younger folk that day at least,
Softened by spring were gathered at the feast,
And as the time drew on, throughout the hall
A horn was sounded, giving note to all
That they at last the looked-for tale should hear.

Then spake a Wanderer, " O kind hosts and dear,
Hearken a little unto such a tale
As folk with us will tell in every vale
About the yule-tide fire, when the snow,
Deep in the passes, letteth men to go
From place to place : now there few great folk be,
Although we upland men have memory
Of ill kings did us ; yet as now indeed
Few have much wealth, few are in utter need.
Like the wise ants a kingless, happy folk
We long have been, not galled by any yoke,
But the white leaguer of the winter tide
Whereby all men at home are bound to bide.
—Alas, my folly ! how I talk of it,
As though from this place where to-day we sit
The way thereto was short—Ah, would to God
Upon the snow-freed herbage now I trod !
But pardon, sirs ; the time goes swiftly by,
Hearken a tale of conquering destiny."

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

ARGUMENT

It was foretold to a great king that he who should reign after him should be low-born and poor ; which thing came to pass in the end, for all that the king could do.

A KING there was in days of old
Who ruled wide lands, nor lacked for gold,
Nor honour, nor much-longed-for praise,
And his days were called happy days,
So peaceable his kingdoms were,
While others wrapt in war and fear
Fell ever unto worse and worse.

Therefore his city was the nurse
Of all that men then had of lore,
And none were driven from his door
That seemed well skilled in anything ;
So of the sages was he king ;
And from this learned man and that,
Little by little, lore he gat,
And many a lordless, troubled land
Fell scarce loth to his dreaded hand.

Midst this it chanced that, on a day,
Clad in his glittering gold array,
He held a royal festival ;
And nigh him in his glorious hall
Beheld his sages most and least,
Sitting much honoured at the feast.

"O King," said he,

“ But few things know I certainly,
Though I have toiled for many a day
Along the hard and doubtful way
That bringeth wise men to the grave :
And now for all the years I gave,
To know all things that man can learn,

A few months' learned life I earn,
Nor feel much liker to a god
Than when beside my sheep I trod
Upon the thymy, wind-swept down.
Yet am I come unto thy town
To tell thee somewhat that I learned
As on the stars I gazed, and yearned
To cast this weary body off,
With all its chains of mock and scoff
And creeping death—for as I read
The sure decrees with joy and dread,
Somewhat I saw writ down of thee,
And who shall have the sovereignty
When thou art gone."

"Nay," said the King,

"Speak quick and tell me of the thing."

"Sire," said the sage, "thine ancient line
Thou holdest as a thing divine,
So long and undisturbed it is,
But now shall there be end to this,
For surely in my glittering text
I read that he who shall sit next,
On this thine ancient throne and high,
Shall be no better born than I
Whose grandsire none remembereth,
Nor where my father first drew breath."

"Yea," said the King, "and this may be ;
Yet, O Sage, ere I credit thee,
Some token certes must thou show,
Or tell me what I think to know,
Alone, among all folk alive ;
Then surely great gifts will I give
To thee, and make thee head of all
Who watch the planets rise and fall."

"Bid these stand backward from thy throne,"
The sage said, "then to thee alone
Long hidden matters will I tell ;
And then, if thou believest, well—

And if thou dost not—well also ;
No gift I ask, but leave to go,
For strange to me is this thy state,
And for thyself, thou well may'st hate
My crabbed age and misery."
"Well," said the King, "let this thing be ;
And ye, my masters, stand aback !
For of the fresh air have I lack,
And in my pleasance would I walk
To hearken this grave elder's talk
And gain new lore."

Therewith he rose
And led the way unto a close,
Shaded with grey-leaved olive-trees ;
And when they were amidst of these
He turned about and said, "Speak, friend,
And of thy folly make an end,
And take this golden chain therefore."
"Rightly thou namest my weak lore,"
The Sage said, "therefore to the end
Be wise, and what the fates may send
Take thou, nor struggle in the net
Wherein thine helpless feet are set !
—Hearken ! a year is well-nigh done
Since, at the hottest of the sun,
Stood Anthony beneath this tree,
And took a jewelled cup of thee,
And drank swift death in guise of wine :
Since he, most trusted of all thine,
At last too full of knowledge grew,
And chiefly, he of all men knew
How the Earl Marshal Hugh had died,
Since he had drawn him on to ride
Into a bushment of his foes,
To meet death from unnumbered blows."
"Thou knowest that by me he died,"
The King said, "how if now I cried,
Help ! the magician slayeth me ?

Swiftly should twenty sword-blades be
Clashing with thy ribs, and thou
Nearer to death than even now."

"Not thus, O King, I fear to die,"
The Sage said; "Death shall pass me by
Many a year yet, because perchance,
I fear not aught his clattering dance,
And have enough of weary days,
—But thou—farewell, and win the praise
Of sages, by thy hearkening
With heed to this most certain thing.
Fear not because this thing I know,
For to my grey tower back I go
High raised above the heathy hills
Where the great erne the swift hare kills,
Or stoops upon the new-year'd lamb;
There almost as a god I am
Unto few folk, who hear thy name
Indeed, but know nought of thy fame,
Nay, scarce if thou be man or beast."
So saying, back unto the feast
He turned, and went adown the hall,
Not heeding any gibe or call;
And left the palace and the town
With face turned toward his windy down.
Back to the hall, too, the King went,
With eyes upon the pavement bent
In pensive thought, delighting not
In riches and his kingly lot;
But thinking how his days began,
And of the lonely souls of man.

But time passed, and midst this and that,
The wise man's message he forgot;
And as a king he lived his life,
And took to him a noble wife
Of the kings' daughters, rich and fair.
And they being wed for nigh a year,
And she now growing great with child,

It happened unto the forest wild
This king with many folk must ride
At ending of the summer-tide ;
There boar and hart they brought to bay,
And had right noble prize that day ;
But when the noon was now long past,
And the thick woods grew overcast,
They roused the mightiest hart of all.
Then loudly 'gan the King to call
Unto his huntsmen, not to leave
That mighty beast for dusk nor eve
Till they had won him ; with which word
His horn he blew, and forth he spurred,
Taking no thought of most or least,
But only of that royal beast.
And over rough and smooth he rode,
Nor yet for anything abode,
Till dark night swallowing up the day
With blindness his swift course must stay.
Nor was there with him any one,
So far his fair steed had outrun
The best of all his hunting-folk.
So, glancing at the stars that broke
'Twixt the thick branches here and there,
Backward he turned, and peered with care
Into the darkness, but saw nought,
Nor heard his folk, and therewith thought
His bed must be the brake leaves brown.
Then in a while he lighted down,
And felt about a little space,
If he might find a softer place ;
But as he groped from tree to tree
Some glimmering light he seemed to see
'Twixt the dark stems, and thither turned,
If yet perchance some wood-fire burned
Within a peasant's hut, where he
Might find, amidst their misery,
Rough food, or shelter at the least.

So, leading on his wearied beast,
Blindly he crept from tree to tree,
Till slowly grew that light to be
The thing he looked for, and he found
A hut on a cleared space of ground,
From whose half-opened door there streamed
The light that erst far off had gleamed.
Then of that shelter was he fain,
But just as he made shift to gain
The open space in front of it,
A shadow o'er the grass did flit.
And on the wretched threshold stood
A big man, with a bar of wood
In his right hand, who seemed as though
He got him ready for a blow ;
But ere he spoke the King cried, " Friend,
May God good hap upon thee send,
If thou wilt give me rest this night,
And food according to thy might."
" Nay," said the carle, " my wife lieth
In labour, and is nigh her death :
Nor canst thou enter here at all,
But nearby is my asses' stall,
Who on this night bide in the town ;
There, if thou wilt, mayst thou lie down,
And sleep until the dawn of day,
And I will bring thee what I may
Of food and drink."

Then said the King,
" Thanked be thou ; neither for nothing
Shalt thou this good deed do to me."
" Nay," said the carle, " let these things be,
Surely I think before the morn,
To be too weary and forlorn
For gold much heart in me to put."
With that he turned, and from the hut
Brought out a lantern, and rye-bread,
And wine, and showed the King a shed,

Strewed with a litter of dry brake :
Withal he muttered, for his sake,
Unto Our Lady some rude prayer,
And turned about and left him there.

So when the rye-bread, nowise fine,
The King had munched, and with green wine
Had quenched his thirst, his horse he tied
Unto a post, and there beside
He fell asleep upon the brake.

But in an hour did he awake,
Astonied with an unnamed fear,
For words were ringing in his ear
Like the last echo of a scream,
“ *Take ! take !* ” but of the vanished dream
No image was there left to him.

Then, trembling sore in every limb,
Did he arise, and drew his sword,
And passed forth on the forest sward.
And cautiously about he crept ;
But he heard nought at all, except
Some groaning of the woodman’s wife,
And forest sounds well known, but rife
With terror to the lonely soul.

Then he lay down again, to roll
His limbs within his huntsman’s cloak ;
And slept again, and once more woke
To tremble with that unknown fear,
And other echoing words to hear—
“ *Give up ! give up !* ” nor anything
Showed more why these strange words should ring
About him. Then he sat upright,
Bewildered, gazing through the night,
Until his weary eyes, grown dim,
Showed not the starlit tree-trunks slim
Against the black wood, grey and plain ;
And into sleep he sank again,
And woke not soon ; but sleeping dreamed
That he awoke, nor other seemed

The place he woke in but that shed,
And there beside his bracken bed
He seemed to see the ancient sage
Shrivelled yet more with untold age,
Who bending down his head to him
Said, with a mocking smile and grim,—
“Take, or give up ; what matters it ?
This child new-born shall surely sit
Upon thy seat when thou art gone,
And dwelling 'twixt straight walls of stone.”

Again the King woke at that word
And sat up, panting and afeard,
And staring out into the night,
Where yet the woods thought not of light ;
And fain he was to cast off sleep,
Such visions from his eyes to keep.
Heavy his head grew none the less,
'Twixt 'wildering thoughts and weariness,
And soon he fell asleep once more,
Nor dreamed, nor woke again, before
The sun shone through the forest trees ;
And, shivering in the morning breeze,
He blinked with just-awakened eyes,
And pondering on those mysteries,
Unto the woodman's hut he went.

Him he found kneeling down, and bent
In moody grief above a bed,
Whereon his wife lay, stark and dead,
Whose soul near morn had passed away ;
And 'twixt the dead and living lay
A new-born man-child, fair and great.
So in the door the King did wait
To watch the man, who had no heed
Of this or that, so sore did bleed
The new-made wound within his heart.
But as the King gazed, for his part
He did but see his threatened foe,

And ever hard his heart did grow
With deadly hate and wilfulness :
And sight of that poor man's distress
Made it the harder, as of nought
But that unbroken line he thought
Of which he was the last : withal
His scornful troubled eyes did fall
Upon that nest of poverty,
Where nought of joy he seemed to see.

On straw the poor dead woman lay ;
The door alone let in the day,
Showing the trodden earthen floor,
A board on trestles weak and poor,
Three stumps of tree for stool or chair,
A half-glazed pipkin, nothing fair,
A bowl of porridge by the wife,
Untouched by lips that lacked for life,
A platter and a bowl of wood ;
And in the further corner stood
A bow cut from the wych-elm tree,
A holly club, and arrows three
Ill pointed, heavy, spliced with thread.

Ah ! soothly, well remembered
Was that unblissful wretched home,
Those four bare walls, in days to come ;
And often in the coming years
He called to mind the pattering tears
That, on the rent old sackcloth cast
About the body, fell full fast,
'Twixt half-meant prayers and curses wild,
And that weak wailing of the child,
His threatened dreaded enemy,
The mighty king that was to be.

But as he gazed unsoftened there,
With hate begot of scorn and care,
Loudly he heard a great horn blow,
And his own hunting call did know,

And soon began the shouts to hear
Of his own people drawing near.
Then lifting up his horn, he blew
A long shrill point, but as he threw
His head aback, beheld his folk,
Who from the close-set thicket broke
And o'er the cleared space swiftly passed,
With shouts that he was found at last.

Then turned the carle his doleful face,
And slowly rising in his place,
Drew thwart his eyes his fingers strong,
And on that gay-dressed glittering throng
Gazed stupidly, as still he heard
The name of King ; but said no word.

But his guest spoke, "Sirs, well be ye !
This luckless woodman, whom ye see,
Gave me good harbour through the night
And such poor victual as he might ;
Therefore shall he have more than gold
For his reward ; since dead and cold
His helpmate lies who last night died.
See now the youngling by her side ;
Him will I take and rear him so
That he shall no more lie alow
In straw, or from the beech-tree dine,
But rather use white linen fine
And silver plate ; and with the sword
Shall learn to serve some King or Lord.
How say'st thou, good man ? "

"Sire," he said,

Weeping, but shamefaced,—“ Since here dead
She lies, that erst kept house for me,
E'en as thou willest let it be ;
Though I had hoped to have a son
To help me get the day's work done.
And now, indeed, forth must he go
If unto manhood he should grow,
And lonely I must wander forth,

To whom, east, west, and south, and north
Are all alike : forgive it me
If little thanks I give to thee
Who scarce can thank great God in heaven
For what is left of what was given."

Small heed unto him the King gave,
But trembling in his haste to have
The body of his enemy,
Said to an old squire, " Bring to me
The babe, and give the good man this
Wherewith to gain a little bliss,
In place of all his troubles gone,
Nor need he now be long alone."

The carle's rough face, at chink of gold,
Lit up, though still did he behold
The wasted body lying there ;
But stooping, a rough box, foursquare,
Made of old wood and lined with hay,
Wherein the helpless infant lay,
He raised, and gave it to the squire
Who on the floor cast down his hire,
Nor sooth dared murmur aught the while,
But turning smiled a grim hard smile
To see the carle his pieces count
Still weeping : so did all men mount
And turning round into the wood
Forgat him and his drearihood,
And soon were far off from the hut.

Then coming out, the door he shut
Behind him, and adown a glade,
Towards a rude hermitage he made
To fetch the priest unto his need,
To bury her and say her bede—
So when all things that he might do
Were done aright, heavy with woe,
He left the woodland hut behind
To take such chance as he might find

In other lands, forgetting all
That in that forest did befall.

But through the wild wood rode the King,
Moody and thinking on the thing,
Nor free from that unreasoning fear ;
Till now, when they had drawn anear
The open country, and could see
The road run on from close to lea,
And lastly by a wooden bridge
A long way from that heathy ridge
Cross over a deep lowland stream—
Then in his eyes there came a gleam,
And his hand fell upon his sword,
And turning round to squire and lord
He said, " Ride, sirs, the way is clear,
Nor of my people have I fear,
Nor do my foes range over wide ;
And for myself fain would I ride
Right slowly homewards through the fields
Noting what this and that one yields ;
While by my squire who bears the child
Lightly my way shall be beguiled.
For some nurse now he needs must have
This tender life of his to save ;
And doubtless by the stream there is
Some house where he may dwell in bliss,
Till he grow old enough to learn
How gold and glory he may earn ;
And grow, perchance, to be a lord."

With downcast eyes he spoke that word ;
But forth they galloped speedily,
And he drew rein and stood to see
Their green coats lessening as they went.
This man unto the other bent,
Until mid dust and haze at last
Into a wavering mass they passed ;
Then 'twixt the hedgerows vanished quite,

Just told of by the dust-cloud white
Rolled upwards 'twixt the elm-trunks slim.

Then turned the King about to him
Who held the child, noting again
The thing wherein he first had lain,
And on one side of it could see
A lion painted hastily
In red upon a ground of white,
As though of old it had been dight
For some lord's rough-wrought palisade ;
But naked 'mid the hay was laid
The child, and had no mark or sign.

Then said the King, " My ancient line
Thou and thy sires through good and ill
Have served, and unto thee my will
Is law enough from day to day ;
Ride nigh me harkening what I say."
He shook his rein and side by side
Down through the meadows did they ride,
And opening all his heart, the King
Told to the old man everything
Both of the sage, and of his dream ;
Withal drawn nigh unto the stream,
He said, " Yet this shall never be,
For surely as thou lovest me,
Adown this water shall he float
With this rough box for ark and boat,
Then if mine old line he must spill
There let God save him if He will,
While I in no case shed his blood."

" Yea," said the squire, " thy words are good,
For the whole sin shall lie on me,
Who greater things would do for thee
If need there were ; yet note, I pray,
It may be he will 'scape this day
And live ; and what wouldst thou do then
If thou shouldst meet him among men ?

I counsel thee to let him go
Since sure to nought thy will shall grow."
"Yea, yea," the King said, "let all be
That may be, if I once but see
This ark whirl in the eddies swift
Or tangled in the autumn drift
And wrong side up : " but with that word
Their horse-hoofs on the plank he heard,
And swift across the bridge he rode,
And nigh the end of it abode,
Then turned to watch the old squire stop,
And leaning o'er the bridge-rail drop
The luckless child ; he heard withal
A muttered word and plashing fall
And from the wakened child a cry,
And saw the cradle hurrying by,
Whirled round and sinking, but as yet
Holding the child, nor overset.

Now somewhat, soothly at the sight
Did the King doubt if he outright
Had rid him of his feeble foe,
But frowning did he turn to go
Unto his home, nor knew indeed
How better he might help his need ;
And as unto his house he rode
Full little care for all he showed,
Still bidding Samuel the squire
Unto his bridle-hand ride nigher,
To whom he talked of careless things,
As unto such will talk great kings.

But when unto his palace gate
He came at last, thereby did wait
The chamberlain with eager eyes
Above his lips grown grave with lies,
In haste to tell him that the queen,
While in the wild-wood he had been,
Had borne a daughter unto him
Strong, fair of face, and straight of limb,

So well at ease and glad thereat
His troubled dream he nigh forgot,
His troubled waking, and the ride
Unto the fateful river-side ;
Or thought of all as little things
Unmeet to trouble souls of kings.

So passed the days, so passed the years
In such-like hopes, and such-like fears,
And such-like deeds in field and hall
As unto royal men befall,
And fourteen years have passed away
Since on the huddled brake he lay
And dreamed that dream, remembered now
Once and again, when slow and slow
The minutes of some sleepless night
Crawl toward the dawning of the light.

Remembered not on this sweet morn
When to the ringing of the horn,
Jingle of bits and mingled shout
Toward that same stream he rideth out
To see his grey-winged falcons fly.

So long he rode he drew anigh
A mill upon the river's brim,
That seemed a goodly place to him,
For o'er the oily smooth millhead
There hung the apples growing red,
And many an ancient apple-tree
Within the orchard could he see,
While the smooth millwalls white and black
Shook to the great wheel's measured clack,
And grumble of the gear within ;
While o'er the roof that dulled that din
The doves sat crooning half the day,
And round the half-cut stack of hay
The sparrows fluttered twittering.
There smiling stayed the joyous King.

And since the autumn noon was hot
Thought good anigh that pleasant spot
To dine that day, and therewith sent
To tell the miller his intent :
Who held the stirrup of the King,
Bareheaded, joyful at the thing,
While from his horse he lit adown,
Then led him o'er an elm-beam brown,
New cut in February tide,
That crossed the stream from side to side.
So underneath the apple-trees
The King sat careless, well at ease,
And ate and drank right merrily.

To whom the miller drew anigh
Among the courtiers, bringing there
Such as he could of country fare,
Green yellowing plums from off his wall,
Wasp-bitten pears, the first to fall
From off the wavering spire-like tree,
Junkets, and cream and fresh honey.
Smiling the King regarded him,
For he was round-paunched, short of limb,
Red-faced, with long, lank flaxen hair ;
But with him was a boy, right fair,
Grey-eyed, and yellow-haired, most like
Unto some Michael who doth strike
The dragon on a minster wall,
So sweet-eyed was he, and withal
So fearless of all things he seemed.
But when he saw him the King deemed
He scarce could be the miller's kin,
And laughing said, " Hast thou within
Thy dusty mill the dame who bore
This stripling in the days of yore,
For fain were I to see her now,
If she be liker him than thou ? "

" Sire," said the miller, " that may be
And thou my dame shalt surely see ;

But for the stripling, neither I
Begat him, nor my wife did lie
In labour when the lad was born,
But as an outcast and forlorn
We found him fourteen years to-day,
So quick the time has passed away."

Then the King, hearkening what he said,
A vanished day remembered,
And troubled grew his face thereat ;
But while he thought of this and that
The man turned from him and was gone
And by him stood the lad alone ;
At whom he gazed, and as their eyes
Met, a great horror 'gan arise
Within his heart, and back he shrank
And shuddering a deep draught he drank,
Scarce knowing if his royal wine
He touched, or juice of some hedge-vine.

But as his eyes he lifted up
From off his jewelled golden cup,
Once more the miller drew anigh,
By whom his wife went timidly
Bearing some burden in her hand ;
So when before him she did stand
And he beheld her worn and old,
And black-haired, then that hair of gold,
Grey eyes, firm lips, and round cleft chin,
Brought stronger memory of his sin.

But the carle spake, " Dame, tell the King
How this befell, a little thing
The thoughts of such great folk to hold,
Speak out, and fear not to be bold."

" My tale," she said, " is short enow,
For this day fourteen year ago
Along this river-side I rode
From market to our poor abode,
Where we dwelt far from other men,

Since thinner was the country then
Than now it is ; so as I went
And wearied o'er my panniers bent,
From out the stream a feeble cry
I heard, and therewith presently,
From off my mule's back could I see
This boy who standeth here by thee,
A naked, new-born infant, laid
In a rough ark that had been stayed
By a thick tangled bed of weed ;
So pitying the youngling's need,
Dismounting, did I wade for him
Waist deep, whose ark now scarce did swim ;
And he, with cold, and misery,
And hunger, was at point to die.

“ Withal, I bare him to the mill
And cherished him, and had good will
To bring the babe up as mine own ;
Since childless were we and alone,
And no one came to father it.
So oft have I rejoiced to sit
Beside the fire and watch him play.
And now, behold him !—but some day
I look to lose him, for, indeed,
I deem he comes of royal seed,
Unmeet for us : and now, my lord,
Have you heard every foolish word
About my son—this boy—whose name
Is Michael soothly ; since he came
To us this day nigh Michaelmas.
—See, Sire, the ark wherein he was !
Which I have kept.”

Therewith she drew
A cloth away ; but the King knew,
Long ere she moved, what he should see,
Nor looked, but seeming carelessly
Leaned on the board and hid his eyes.
But at the last did he arise

And saw the painted lion red,
Not faded, well remembered ;
Withal he thought, " And who of these
Were with me then amongst the trees
To see this box ? " but presently
He thought again that none but he
And the grey squire, old Samuel,
That painting could have noted well.
Since Samuel his coat had cast
About it, and therewith had passed
Throughout the forest on that day,
And not till all were well away
Had drawn it off before the King.
But changed and downcast at the thing
He left the lovely autumn place,
Still haunted by the new-found face
Of his old foe, and back he rode
Unto his ancient rich abode,
Forcing but dismal merriment
As midst his smiling lords he went ;
Who yet failed not to note his mood,
So changed : and some men of the wood
Remembered them, but said not aught,
Yea, trembled lest their hidden thought
Some bird should learn, and carry it.

The morrow come, the King did sit
Alone, to talk with Samuel,
Who yet lived, gathering wage for hell.
He from the presence in a while
Came forth, and with his ugly smile
He muttered, " Well betide me, then,
St. Peter ! they are lucky men
Who serve no kings, since they indeed
May damn themselves each for his need,
And will not he outlive this day
Whom the deep water could not slay,
Ere yet his lips had tasted food ? "

With that a horse, both strong and good,
He gat of the King's equerry,
And toward the mill rode speedily.

There Michael by the mill-tail lay,
Watching the swift stream snatch away
His float from midst the careless dace ;
But thinking of the thin, dark face,
That yesterday all men he saw
Gaze at with seeming love and awe ;
Nor had he, wondering at the lords,
Lost one word of the housewife's words ;
And still he noted that the King
Beheld him as a wondrous thing,
Strange to find there : so in his heart
He thought to play some royal part
In this wild play of life, and made
Stories, wherein great words he said,
And did great deeds in desperate fight.
But midst these thoughts there came in sight
He who had carried him of yore,
From out the woodman's broken door,
Dressed like a king's man, with fine gold
Touching his hard brown hands and old,
So was his sleeve embroidered ;
A plumed hat had he on his head,
And by his side a cutting sword
Fit for the girdle of a lord ;
And round his neck a knife he bore,
Whose hilt was well enamelled o'er,
With green leaves on a golden ground,
Whose stem a silver scroll enwound ;
Charged with those letters, writ in black,
Strike ! for no dead man cometh back.

The boy gazed at him earnestly,
With beating heart, as he drew nigh.
And when at last he drew his rein
Beside him, thought that not in vain

His dream might be. But Samuel
Below his breath said, "Surely well
Shalt thou fulfil thy destiny ;
And, spite of all, thou wilt not die
Till thou hast won the arched crown."

But with that word he lighted down,
And said aloud, "Lad, tell to me
Where the good miller I may see,
For from the King I come to-day,
And have a word to him to say ;
I think, indeed, concerning thee ;
For surely thou his lad must be."

Then Michael leapt up, nor took heed
Of how the nibbling dace might feed
Upon the loose ends of his bait ;
"Fair sir," he said, "my sire doth wait
Until men bring his mare from grass,
For to the good town will he pass,
Since he has need of household gear ;
Follow, my lord, the place is here."

Withal, the good steed being made fast,
Unto the other side they passed,
And by the door the miller found,
Who bowed before him to the ground,
And asked what he would have him do—
Then from his bosom Samuel drew
A scroll, and said, "Good friend, read here,
And do my bidding without fear
Of doing ill."

"Sir," said the man,
"But little lettered skill I can ;
Let my dame come, for she can read
Well-written letters at good need."

"Nay, friend," he said, "suffice it thee
This seal at the scroll's end to see,
My Lord the King's ; and hear my word,
That I come hither from my lord
Thy foundling lad to have away

To serve the King from this same day."

Downcast the miller looked thereat,
And twisting round his dusty hat,
Said, " Well, my lord, so must it be,
Nor is he aught akin to me,
Nor seems so : none the less would I
Have left him, when I came to die,
All things I have, with this my mill,
Wherein he hath no 'prentice skill,
Young as he is : and surely here
Might he have lived, with little fear,
A life of plenty and of bliss—
Near by, too, a fair maid there is,
I looked should be good wife to him."

Meanwhile young Michael's head 'gan swim
With thoughts of noble life and praise ;
And he forgot the happy days
Wherein the happy dreams he dreamed
That now so near fulfilment seemed ;
And, looking through the open mill,
Stared at the grey and windy hill
And saw it not, but some fair place
Made strange with many a changing face,
And all his life that was to be.

But Samuel, laughing scornfully,
Said, " O good soul, thou thinkest then
This is a life for well-born men,
As our lord deems this youngling is—
Tell me, good lad, where lies thy bliss ? "

But Michael turned shamefaced and red,
Waked from his dream, and stammering said,
" Fair sir, my life is sweet and good,
And John, the ranger of the wood,
Saith that I draw so good a bow,
That I shall have full skill enow
Ere many months have passed me by
To join the muster, and to try

To win the bag of florins white,
That folk, on Barnaby the bright,
Shoot for within the market town.
Sir, please you to look up and down
The weedy reaches of our stream,
And note the bubbles of the bream,
And see the great chub take the fly,
And watch the long pike basking lie
Outside the shadow of the weed.
Withal there come unto our need
Woodcock and snipe when swallows go ;
And now the water-hen flies low
With feet that well-nigh touch the reeds,
And plovers cry about the meads,
And the stares chatter ; certes, sir,
It is a fair place all the year."

Eyeing him grimly, Samuel said,
" Thou show'st churl's breeding, by my head,
In foul despite of thy fair face !
Take heart, for to a better place
Thou goest now.—Miller, farewell,
Nor need'st thou to the neighbours tell
The noble fortunes of the lad ;
For, certes, he shall not be glad
To know them in a year or twain.
Yet shall thy finding not be vain,
And thou mayst bless it ; for behold
This bag wherein is store of gold ;
Take it and let thy hinds go play,
And grind no corn for many a day,
For it would buy thy mill and thee."

He turned to go, but pensively
Stood Michael, for his broken dream
Doubtful and far away did seem
Amid the squire's rough mockeries ;
And tears were gathering in his eyes.
But the kind miller's rough farewell
Rang in his ears ; and Samuel

Stamped with his foot and plucked his sleeve ;
So therewithal he turned to leave
His old abode, the quiet place,
Trembling, with wet and tearful face.

But even as he turned there came
From out the house the simple dame
And cast rough arms about the lad,
Saying, " For that I have been glad
By means of thee this many a day,
My mourning heart this hour doth pay.
But, fair son, may'st thou live in bliss,
And die in peace ; remembering this,
When thou art come to high estate,
That in our house, early and late,
The happy house that shall be sad,
Thou hadst the best of all we had
And love unfeigned from us twain,
Whose hearts thou madest young again,
Hearts that the quicker old shall grow
Now thou art gone."

" Good dame, enow,"

Quoth Samuel, " the day grows late,
And sure the King for meat shall wait
Until he sees this new-found lord."
He strode away upon that word ;
And half ashamed, and half afeard,
Yet eager as his dream he neared,
Shyly the lad went after him.
They crossed the stream and by its brim
Both mounted the great warhorse grey,
And without word they rode away.

But as along the river's edge
They went, and brown birds in the sedge
Twittered their sweet and formless tune
In the fair autumn afternoon,
And reach by reach the well-known stream
They passed, again the hopeful dream

Of one too young to think death near,
Who scarce had learned the name of fear
Remorseful memories put to flight ;
Lovely the whole world showed and bright.
Nor did the harsh voice rouse again
The thought of mockery or of pain,
For other thoughts held Samuel.

So, riding silently and well,
They reached at last the dusty road
That led unto the King's abode.
But Samuel turned away his face
Therefrom, and at a steady pace
The great horse thundered o'er the bridge,
And made on toward the heathy ridge,
Wherefrom they rode that other day.
But Michael, noting well the way,
Why thus they went fell wondering,
And said aloud, " Dwells then the King,
Fair sir, as now within the wood ? "

" Young fool, where that it seems him good
He dwelleth," quoth old Samuel,
" And now it pleaseth him to dwell
With the black monks across the wood."

Withal he muttered in his hood,
" Curst be the King, and thee also,
Who thrust me out such deeds to do,
When I should bide at home to pray,
Who draw so nigh my ending day."
So saying forth his horse he spurred
And to himself said yet this word,
" Yea, yea, and of all days forlorn
God curse the day when I was born."

Therewith he groaned ; yet saying thus
His case seemed hard and piteous,
When he remembered how of old,
Another tale he might have told.

So as each thought his own thoughts still,
The horse began to breast the hill,

And still they went on higher ground,
Until as Michael turned him round
He saw the sunny country-side
Spread out before him far and wide,
Golden amidst its waning green,
Joyous with varied life unseen.
Meanwhile from side to side of them
The trees began their way to hem,
As still he gazed from tree to tree,
And when he turned back presently
He saw before him like a wall
Uncounted tree-trunks dim and tall.
Then with their melancholy sound
The odorous spruce-woods met around
Those wayfarers, and when he turned
Once more, far off the sunlight burned
In star-like spots, while from o'erhead,
Dim twilight through the boughs was shed.

Not there as yet had Michael been,
Nor had he left the meadows green
Dotted about with spreading trees,
And fresh with sun and rain and breeze,
For those mirk woods, and still his eyes
Gazed round about for mysteries.
Since many an old wife's tale he knew ;
Huge woodcutters in raiment blue,
The remnant of a mighty race,
The ancient masters of the place,
And hammering trolls he looked to see,
And dancers of the faërie,
Who, as the ancient stories told,
In front were lovely to behold,
But empty shells seen from behind.

So on they rode until the wind
Had died out, stifled by the trees,
And Michael 'mid those images
Of strange things made alive by fear,

Grew drowsy in the forest drear ;
Nor noted how the time went past
Until they nigh had reached at last
The borders of the spruce-tree wood ;
And with a tingling of the blood
Samuel bethought him of the day
When turned about the other way
He carried him he rode with now.
For the firs ended on the brow
Of a rough gravelly hill, and there
Lay a small valley nowise fair
Beneath them, clear at first of all
But brake, till amid rushes tall
Down in the bottom alders grew
Crabbed and rough ; and winding through
The clayey mounds a brook there was
Oozy and foul, half choked with grass.

There now the Squire awhile drew rein,
And noted how the ground again
Rose up upon the other side,
And saw a green glade opening wide
'Twixt oaks and hollies, and he knew
Full well what place it led unto ;
Withal he heard the bittern's boom,
And though without the fir-wood's gloom
They now were come, yet red and low
The sun above the trees did show,
And in despite of hardihead,
The old squire had a mortal dread
Of lying in the wood alone
When that was done that should be done.

Now Michael, wakened by the wind,
Clutched tighter at the belt behind,
And with wide eyes was staring round,
When Samuel said, " Get to the ground,
My horse shall e'en sink deep enow,
Without thy body, in this slough ;
And haste thee, or we both shall lie

Beneath the trees, and be as dry
As autumn dew can make us. Haste !
The time is short for thee to waste."

Then from the horse the boy did glide,
And slowly down the valley side
They went, and Michael, wakened now,
Sang such rude songs as he might know,
Grown fresh and joyous of his life ;
While Samuel, clutching at the knife
About his neck that hung, again
Down in the bottom tightened rein,
And turning, in a hoarse voice said,
" My girths are loosening, by my head !
Come nigh and draw them tighter, lad."

Then Michael stayed his carol glad,
And noting little in his mirth
The other's voice, unto the girth
Without a word straight set his hand :
But as with bent head he did stand,
Straining to tighten what was tight,
In Samuel's hand the steel flashed bright,
And fell, deep smitten in his side,
Then, leaping back, the poor lad cried,
As if for help, and staggering fell,
With wide eyes fixed on Samuel ;
Who none the less grown deadly pale,
Lit down, lest that should not avail
To slay him, and beside him knelt,
And since his eyes were closed now, felt
His heart that beat yet : therewithal
His hand upon the knife did fall.
But, ere his fingers clutched it well,
Far off he seemed to hear a bell,
And trembling knelt upright again,
And listening, listened not in vain,
For clear he heard a tinkling sound.
Then to his horse from off the ground
He leapt, nor reasoned with his dread,

But thought the angel of the dead
Was drawing nigh the slayer to slay,
Ere scarce the soul had passed away.
One dreadful moment yet he heard
That bell, then like a madman spurred
His noble horse ; that maddened too,
The close-set fir-wood galloped through,
Not stayed by any stock or stone,
Until the furious race being done,
Anigh the bridge he fell down dead ;
And Samuel, mazed with guilt and dread,
Wandered afoot throughout the night,
But came, at dawning of the light,
Half-dead unto the palace gate.

There till the opening did he wait ;
Then, by the King's own signet-ring,
He gained the chamber of the King,
And painfully what he had done
He told, and how the thing had gone.
And said withal : " Yet is he dead,
And surely that which made my dread
Shall give thee joy : for doubt not aught
That bell the angels to him brought,
That he in Abraham's breast might lie—
So ends, O King, the prophecy."

Nathless the King scowled, ill content,
And said, " I deemed that I had sent
A man of war to do my will,
Who lacked for neither force nor skill,
And thou com'st with a woman's face,
Bewildered with thy desperate race,
And made an idiot with thy fear,
Nor bring'st me any token here ! "

Therewith he rose and gat away,
But brooding on it through that day,
Thought that all things went not so ill
As first he deemed, and that he still
Might leave his old line flourishing.

Therewith both gold and many a thing
Unto old Samuel he gave,
But thereby failed his life to save ;
Who, not so old in years as sin,
Died ere the winter, and within
The minster choir was laid asleep,
With carven saints his head to keep.

And so the days and years went by,
And still in great felicity
The King dwelt, wanting only this—
A son wherewith to share his bliss,
And reign when he was dead and gone.
Nor had he daughter, save that one
Born on the night when Michael first,
Forlorn, alone, and doubly cursed,
Felt on him this world's bitter air.

This daughter, midst fair maids most fair,
Was not yet wed, though at this time,
Being come unto her maiden's prime,
She looked upon her eighteenth May.

Midst this her mother passed away,
Not much lamented of the King,
Who had the thought of marrying
Some dame more fertile, and who sent
A wily man with this intent
To spy the countries out and find
Some great king's daughter, wise and kind,
And fresh, and fair, in face and limb,
In all things a fit mate for him.

So in short time it came to pass
Again the King well wedded was,
And hoped once more to have a son.

And when this fair dame he had won,
A year in peace he dwelt with her,
Until the time was drawing near
When first his eyes beheld that foe
He deemed was dead these years ago.

Now at that time, as custom was,
His daughter was about to pass
Unto a distant house of his,
Some king had built for worldly bliss
In ancient days : there, far removed
From courts or towns, the dame he loved
The dead king had been wont to see
Play mid the summer greenery,
Or like Erigone of old
Stand in the vineyards girt with gold,
To queen it o'er the vintagers,
Half worshipping that face of hers.
Long years ago these folk were passed,
Their crimes forgotten, or else cast
Into the glowing crucible
Of time, that tempers all things well,
That maketh pleasure out of pain,
And out of ruin golden gain ;
Nathless, unshaken still, there stood
The towers and ramparts red as blood ;
Wherein their lives had passed away ;
And still the lovely gardens lay
About them, changed, but smiling still,
As in past time, on good or ill.

Thither the Princess Cecily
Must go awhile in peace to be ;
For now, midst care, and doubt, and toil,
Proud words drawn back, and half-healed broil,
The King had found one meet to wed
His daughter, of great goodlihead,
Wealth, and unbroken royalty.
And now he said to her, when she
Was setting out for that fair place,
“ O daughter, thou shalt see my face
Before a month is fully gone,
Nor wilt thou see me then alone ;
For that man shall be with me then
Whom I have chosen from all men

To give my dearest treasure to.
Most fain he is to look on you,
Nor needst thou fear him for thy part,
Who holdeth many a woman's heart
As the net holds the silvery fish.
Farewell—and all things thou mayst wish
I pray God grant thee.”

Therewithal

He kissed her, and from out the hall
She passed, not shamefaced, or afraid
Of what might happen ; though, indeed,
Her heart of no man's heart had need
To make her happy as she thought.

Ever the new sun daily brought
Fresh joy of life to her bedside,
The world before her open wide
Was spread, a place for joy and bliss.
Her lips had trembled with no kiss,
Wherewith love slayeth fear and shame ;
Her grey eyes conscious of no blame,
Beheld unmoved the eyes of men ;
Her hearing grew no dimmer when
Some unused footstep she might hear ;
And unto no man was she dear,
But as some goddess might have been
When Greek men worshipped many a queen.

Now with her armed folk forth she rode
Unto that ancient fair abode,
And while the lark sung o'er the corn,
Love gilded not the waning morn ;
And when the sun rose high above,
High thoughts she thought, but not of love ;
And when that sun the world did leave,
He left no love to light the eve.
The moon no melancholy brought,
The dawn no vain, remorseful thought.

But all untroubled her sweet face
Passed 'neath the gate of that old place,
And there her bridegroom she abode.

But scarce was she upon the road
Ere news unto the King was brought
That Peter, the old Abbot, sought
To see him, having newly come
From the wild place that was his home
Across the forest ; so the King
Bade him to enter, well willing
To hear what he might have to say ;
Who, entering the hall straightway,
Had with him an old, reverend man,
The Sub-prior, Father Adrian,
And five monks more, and therewithal
Ten of his folk, stout men and tall,
Who bore armed staves and coats of fence.

So, when he came to audience,
He prayed the King of this or that,
Whereof my tale-teller forgot,
And graciously the King heard all,
And said at last, " Well, what may fall,
Thou go'st not hence, fair lord, to-day ;
Unless in vain a king must pray,
Thou and thy monks shall eat with me ;
While feast thine axe-men merrily."

Withal, he eyed the Abbot's folk
In careless mood, then once more spoke,
" Tall men thou feedest, by the rood !
Lord Abbot, come they from the wood ?
Dwell many more such thereabout ?
Fain were I such should swell the shout
When I am armed, and rank meets rank."

But as he spoke his loud voice sank
Wavering, nor heard he aught at all
Of the faint noises of the hall,
Or what the monk in answer said ;

For, looking from a steel-clad head,
Those eyes again did he behold,
That erst from 'neath the locks of gold
Kindly and bold, but soft with awe,
Beneath the apple-boughs he saw.

But when for sure this thing he knew
Pale to the very lips he grew.
Till gathering heart within a while
With the faint semblance of a smile,
He seemed to note the Abbot's words
That he heard not ; then from the lords
He turned, and facing Michael said,
" Raise up the steel cap from thine head,
That I may see if thou look'st bold ;
Methinks, I know thy face of old,
Whence com'st thou ? "

Michael lifted straight
From off his brow the steel cap's weight,
And showed the bright locks curling round
His fresh and ruddy face, sun-browned,
And in a voice clear as a bell
Told all his story, till he fell
Sore wounded in that dismal vale,
And said withal, " My lord, the tale
Of what came after, none knoweth
Better than he, who, from ill death
Saved me that tide, and made me man,
My lord, the Sub-prior Adrian."

" Speak on then, father," quoth the King,
Making as he was still hearkening.

" My lord," said Adrian, " I, who then
Was but a server of poor men,
Outside our Abbey walls, one day
Was called by one in poor array,
A charcoal-burner's lad, who said
That soon his father would be dead,
And that of all things he would have
His rights, that he his soul might save."

I made no tarrying at that word,
But took between mine hands the Lord,
And bade the boy bear forth the bell ;
For though few folk there were to tell
Who passed that way, nathless, I trow
The beasts were glad that news to know.
“ Well, by the pinewood’s skirts we went
While through its twilight the bell sent
A heavenly tinkling ; but the lad
’Gan telling me of fears he had
Of elves who dwell within the wood.
I chid him thereat, as was good,
Bidding him note Whom in mine hands
I held, the Ransom of all Lands.
But as the fir-wood’s dim twilight
Waxed into day, and fair and bright
The evening sun showed through the trees,
Our ears fanned by the evening breeze,
The galloping of horse-hoofs heard,
Wherewith my page hung back afeard
Of elves and such-like ; but I said,
‘ Wilt thou thy father should be dead
Ere we can reach him ? Oh, my son,
Fear not that aught can stay This One.’
“ Therewith I smote my mule, and he
Ran forward with me hastily
As fearing to be left behind.
Well, as we went, what should we find
Down by the stream but this my son,
Who seemed as though his days were done ;
For in his side a knife there stood
Wherefrom, ran out a stream of blood,
Soaking the grass and water-mint ;
Then, I dismounting, we by dint
Of all our strength, the poor youth laid
Upon my mule, and down a glade
Of oaks and hollies then we passed,
And reached the woodman’s home at last ;

A poor hut, built of wattled wood,
And by its crooked gable stood
A ruinous shed, unroofed and old,
That beasts of burden once did hold.
—Thyself, my lord, mayst know it well,
Since thereabout the wild swine dwell ;
And hart, and hind, and roe are there—
So the lad's wounds I staunch'd with care
Forthwith, and then the man I shrived,
Who none the less got well and lived
For many a day : then back I went
And the next day our leech I sent
With drugs to tend upon the lad.
Who soon was as he ne'er had had
A hurt at all : and he being well
We took him in our house to dwell,
And taught him letters, and, indeed,
Before long, Latin could he read
As well as I ; but hath no will
To turn unto religion still.
Yet is he good and doth no wrong ;
And being thereto both hale and strong,
My lord, the Abbot, sayeth of him,
' He shall serve God with heart and limb,
Not heart and voice.' Therefore, my lord,
Thou seest him armed with spear and sword
For their defence who feed him still,
Teach him, and guard his soul from ill.
Ho, Michael ! hast thou there with thee
The fair-wrought knife I first did see
Deep in thy side ?—there, show it now
Unto the King, that he may know
Our tale is not a fabled thing."

Withal the King, as one listening,
With his thin, anxious face and pale,
Sat leaning forward through this tale,
Scarce noting here and there a word.
But all being told, at last he heard

His own voice changed, and harsh, and low
That said, "Fair lord, I fain would know
Since this your man-at-arms seems true,
What thing will he be worth to you ;
For better had he wear my rose
Than loiter in your Abbey-close,
Poring o'er books no man can read."

"O sire!" the monk said, "if your need
Be great of such men, let him go ;
My men-at-arms need make no show
Of fairness, nor should ladies miss,
E'en as thou say'st, such men as this."

Laughing he spoke ; the King the while
His pale face puckering to a smile ;
Then, as in some confused dream,
In Michael's hand he saw the gleam
Of that same steel remembered well,
The gift he gave to Samuel ;
Drawn from his father's ancient chest
To do that morn his own behest.
And as he now beheld its sheen,
The twining stem of gold and green,
The white scroll with the letters black,—
Strike ! for no dead man cometh back !
He hardened yet his heart once more,
And grown unhappy as before,
When last he had that face in sight,
Brought now the third time to the light,
Once more was treacherous, fierce, and fell.

Now was the Abbot feasted well
With all his folk, then went away,
But Michael clad in rich array
Became the King's man, and was thought
By all most happy to be brought
Unto such hopeful fair estate.

For ten days yet the King did wait,
Which past, for Michael did he send,

And he being come, said to him, " Friend,
Take now this letter from my hand
And go unto our southern land ;
My captain Hugh shall go with thee
For one day's journey, then shall he
Tell thee which way thou hast to ride ;
The third day thence about noontide
If thou dost well, thou shouldst be close
Unto my Castle of the Rose
Where dwells my daughter ; needs it is
That no man living should see this
Until that thou within my wall
Hast given it to the Seneschal ;
Be wise and wary then, that thou
Mayst think of this that happeneth now
As birthday to thine high estate."

So said he, knowing not that fate
Was dealing otherwise than he.

But Michael going, presently
Met Hugh, a big man rough and black,
And who of nought but words had lack,
With him he mounted, and set forth
And daylong rode on from the north.

Now if the King had hope that Hugh
Some deed like Samuel's might do
I know not, certes nought he said
To that hard heart and narrow head,
Who knew no wiles but wiles of war,
And was as true as such men are ;
Yet had there been a tale to tell
If Michael had not held him well,
And backward still the wrath had turned
Wherewith his heart not seldom burned
At scornful words his fellow said.

At last they reached cross ways that led
One west, one southward still, whereat
Hugh, taking off his feathered hat,
Bowed low in scorn, and said, " Fair sir,

Unto the westward must I spur,
While you go southward, soon to get,
I doubt not, an earl's coronet ;
Farewell, my lord, and yet beware
Thou dost not at my lady stare
Too hard, lest thou shouldst plumb the moat,
Or have a halter round thy throat."

But Michael to his scoff said nought,
But upon high things set his thought
As his departing hooves he heard.
And still betwixt the hedgerows spurred,
And when the twilight was o'erpast
At a small inn drew rein at last,
And slept that night as such folk can ;
And while next morn the thrushes ran
Their first course through the autumn dew
The gossamers did he dash through,
And on his way rode steadily
The live-long day, nor yet was he
Alone, as well might be that day,
Since a fair town was in his way.
Stout hinds he passed, and yeomen good,
Some friar in his heavy hood,
And white-coifed housewives mounted high
Above their maunds, while merrily
The well-shod damsel trudged along
Beside them, sending forth a song
As little taught as is a bird's ;
And good men, good wives, priests, and herds,
And merry maids failed not to send
Good wishes for his journey's end
Unto him as still on he sped,
Free from all evil thoughts or dread.

Withal again the day went by,
And in that city's hostelry
He slept, and by the dawn of day
Next morn again was on his way,

And leaving the scarce wakened street
The newly risen sun did greet
With cheerful heart. His way wound on
Still up and up till he had won
Up to a great hill's chalky brow,
Whence looking back he saw below
The town spread out, church, square, and street,
And baily, crawling up the feet
Of the long yew-besprinkled hill ;
And in the fragrant air and still,
Seeming to gain new life from it,
The doves from roof to roof did flit :
The early fires sent up their smoke
That seemed to him to tell of folk
New wakened unto great delight :
For he upon that morning bright,
So joyous felt, so free from pain,
He seemed as he were born again
Into some new immortal state
That knew no envy, fear, or hate.

Now the road turned to his left hand
And led him through a table-land,
Windy and barren of all grain ;
But where a hollow specked the plain
The yew-trees hugged the sides of it,
And mid them did the woodlark flit
Or sang well sheltered from the wind,
And all about the sheep did find
Sweet grass, the while the shepherd's song
Rang clear as Michael sped along.

Long time he rode, till suddenly,
When now the sun was broad and high,
From out a hollow where the yew
Still guarded patches of the dew,
He found at last that he had won
That highland's edge, and gazed upon
A valley that beneath the haze
Of that most fair of autumn days,

Showed glorious ; fair with golden sheaves,
Rich with the darkened autumn-leaves,
Gay with the water-meadows green,
The bright blue streams that lay between,
The miles of beauty stretched away
From that bleak hill-side bare and grey,
Till white cliffs over slopes of vine,
Drew 'gainst the sky a broken line.
And 'twixt the vineyards and the stream
Michael saw gilded spirelets gleam ;
For, hedged with many a flowery close,
There lay the Castle of the Rose,
His hurried journey's aim and end.

Then downward he began to wend,
And 'twixt the flowery hedges sweet
He heard the hook smite down the wheat,
And murmur of the unseen folk ;
But when he reached the stream that broke
The golden plain, but leisurely
He passed the bridge, for he could see
The masters of that ripening realm,
Cast down beneath an ancient elm
Upon a little strip of grass,
From hand to hand the pitcher pass,
While on the turf beside them lay
The ashen-handled sickles grey,
The matters of their cheer between :
Slices of white cheese, specked with green,
And green-striped onions and ryebread,
And summer apples faintly red,
Even beneath the crimson skin ;
And yellow grapes, well ripe and thin,
Plucked from the cottage gable-end.

And certes Michael felt their friend
Hearing their voices, nor forgot
His boyhood and the pleasant spot

Beside the well-remembered stream ;
And friendly did this water seem
As through its white-flowered weeds it ran
Bearing good things to beast and man.

Yea, as the parapet he passed,
And they a greeting toward him cast,
Once more he felt a boy again ;
As though beneath the harvest wain
He was asleep, by that old stream,
And all these things were but a dream—
The King, the Squire, the hurrying ride
Unto the lonely quagmire side ;
The sudden pain, the deadly swoon,
The feverish life from noon to noon ;
The tending of the kind old man,
The black and white Dominican,
The hour before the Abbot's throne,
The poring o'er old books alone,
In summer morn ; the King again,
The envious greetings of strange men,
This mighty horse and rich array,
This journey on an unknown way.

Surely he thought to wake from it,
And once more by the wagon sit,
Blinking upon the sunny mill.

But not for either good or ill
Shall he see one of all those days ;
On through the quivering noontide haze
He rode, and now on either hand
Heavy with fruit the trees did stand ;
Nor had he ridden long, ere he
The red towers of the house could see
Grey on the wind-beat southern side :
And soon the gates thrown open wide
He saw, the long-fixed drawbridge down,
The moat, with lilies overgrown,
Midst which the gold-scaled fishes lay :
Such peace was there for many a day.

And deep within the archway's shade
The warder on his cloak was laid,
Dozing, one hand upon a harp.
And nigh him a great golden carp
Lay stiff with all his troubles done,
Drawn from the moat ere yet the sun
Was high, and nigh him was his bane,
An angling rod of Indian cane.

Now hearing Michael's horse-hooves smite
The causeway, shading from the light
His eyes, as one scarce yet awake,
He made a shift his spear to take,
And, eyeing Michael's badge the while,
Rose up, and with a lazy smile,
Said, "Ho ! fair sir, abide, abide,
And show why hitherward ye ride
Unto my lady's royal home."
Said Michael, "From the King I come,
As by my badge ye well may see ;
And letters have I here with me
To give my lord the Seneschal."

"Yea," said the man, "but in the hall
He feasteth now ; what haste is there,
Certes full quickly cometh care ;
And sure I am he will not read
Thy letters, or to aught give heed
Till he has played out all the play,
And every guest has gone away ;
So thou, O damoiseau, must wait ;
Tie up thine horse anigh the gate,
And sit with me, and thou shalt hear
The Kaiser lieth on his bier.
Thou laughest—hast thou never heard
Of this same valorous Red Beard,
And how he died ? Well, I can sing
Of many another dainty thing,
Thou wilt not a long while forget,
The budget is not empty yet.

—Peter ! I think thou mockest me,
But thou art young and fair perdie,
I wish thee luck—well, thou mayest go
And feel the afternoon wind blow
Within Dame Bertha's pleasance here ;
She who was held so lief and dear,
All this was built but for her sake,
Who made the hearts of men to ache ;
And dying full of years and shame
Yet left an unforgotten name—
God rest her soul ! ”

Michael the while
Hearkened his talking with a smile,
Then said, “ O friend, I think to hear
Both *The King lieth on his bier*
And many another song of thee,
Ere I depart ; but now show me
The pleasance of the ancient queen,
For these red towers above the green
Show like the gates of Paradise,
That surely somewhere through them lies.”

Then said the warder, “ That may be
If thou know'st what may come to thee—
When past the drawbridge thou hast gone,
Upon the left three steps of stone
Lead to a path beneath the wall
Of the great court, that folk now call
The falconer's path, nor canst thou miss
Going thereby to find the bliss
Thou look'st for, since the path ends there,
And through a wicket gilded fair
The garden lies where thou wouldst be :
Nor will I fail to come to thee
Whene'er my lord the Seneschal
Shall pass well fed from out the hall.”

Then Michael, thanking him, passed on,
And soon the gilded wicket won,
And entered that pleasance sweet,

And wandered there with wary feet
And open mouth, as though he deemed
That in some lovely dream he dreamed,
And feared to wake to common day,
So fair was all ; and e'en decay
Brought there but pensive loveliness,
Where autumn those old walls did bless
With wealth of fruit, and through the grass
Unscared the spring-born thrush did pass,
Who yet knew nought of winter-tide.

So wandering, to a fountain's side
He came, and o'er the basin hung,
Watching the fishes, as he sung
Some song remembered from of old,
Ere yet the miller won that gold.
But soon made drowsy with his ride,
And the warm hazy autumn-tide,
And many a musical sweet sound,
He cast him down upon the ground,
And watched the glittering water leap
Still singing low, nor thought to sleep.

But scarce three minutes had gone by
Before, as if in mockery,
The starling chattered o'er his head,
And nothing he remembered,
Nor dreamed of aught that he had seen.

Meanwhile unto that garden green
Had come the Princess, and with her
A maiden that she held right dear,
Who knew the inmost of her mind.
Now those twain, as the scented wind
Played with their raiment or their hair,
Had late been running here and there,
Chasing each other merrily,
As maids do, thinking no one by ;
But now, well wearied therewithal,
Had let their gathered garments fall

About their feet, and slowly went :
And through the leaves a murmur sent,
As of two happy doves that sing
The soft returning of the spring.

Now of these twain the Princess spoke
The less, but into laughter broke
Not seldom, and would redden oft,
As on her lips her fingers soft
She laid, as still the other maid,
Half grave, half smiling, follies said.

So in their walk they drew anigh
That fountain in the midst, whereby
Lay Michael sleeping, dreaming nought
Of such fair things so nigh him brought ;
They, when the fountain shaft was past,
Beheld him on the ground down-cast,
And stopped at first, until the maid
Stepped lightly forward to the shade,
And when she had gazed there awhile
Came running back again, a smile
Parting her lips, and her bright eyes
Afire with many fantasies ;
And ere the Lady Cecily
Could speak a word, " Hush ! hush ! " said she ;
" Did I not say that he would come
To woo thee in thy peaceful home
Before thy father brought him here ?
Come, and behold him, have no fear !
The great bell would not wake him now,
Right in his ears."

" Nay, what dost thou ? "
The Princess said : " Let us go hence ;
Thou know'st I give obedience
To what my father bids ; but I
A maid full fain would live and die,
Since I am born to be a queen."

" Yea, yea, for such as thou hast seen,
That may be well," the other said.

“ But come now, come ; for by my head
This one must be from Paradise ;
Come swiftly then, if thou art wise,
Ere aught can snatch him back again.”

She caught her hand, and not in vain
She prayed ; for now some kindly thought
To Cecily's brow fair colour brought,
And quickly 'gan her heart to beat
As love drew near those eyes to greet,
Who knew him not till that sweet hour.

So over the fair, pink-edged flower
Softly she stepped ; but when she came
Anigh the sleeper, lovely shame
Cast a soft mist before her eyes
Full filled of many fantasies.
But when she saw him lying there
She smiled to see her mate so fair ;
And in her heart did Love begin
To tell his tale, nor thought she sin
To gaze on him that was her own,
Not doubting he was come alone
To woo her, whom midst arms and gold
She deemed she should at first behold ;
And with that thought love grew again
Until departing was a pain,
Though fear grew with that growing love,
And with her lingering footsteps strove
As from the place she turned to go,
Sighing and murmuring words full low.
But as her raiment's hem she raised,
And for her merry fellow gazed,
Shamefaced and changed, she met her eyes
Turned grave and sad with ill surprise ;
Who while the Princess mazed did stand
Had drawn from Michael's loosened band
The King's scroll, which she held out now
To Cecily, and whispered low,

"Read, and do quickly what thou wilt,
Sad, sad ! such fair life to be spilt :
Come further first."

With that they stepped
A pace or two from where he slept,
And then she read,

" Lord Seneschal,
*On thee and thine may all good fall ;
Greeting hereby the King sendeth,
And biddeth thee to put to death
His enemy who beareth this ;
And as thou lovest life and bliss,
And all thy goods thou holdest dear,
Set thou his head upon a spear.
A good half furlong from the gate—
Our coming hitherward to wait—
So perish the King's enemies ! "*

She read, and scarcely had her eyes
Seen clear her father's name and seal,
Ere all love's power her heart did feel,
That drew her back in spite of shame,
To him who was not e'en a name
Unto her a short hour ago.
Panting she said, " Wait thou alone
Beside him, watch him carefully
And let him sleep if none draw nigh.
If of himself he waketh, then
Hide him until I come again,
When thou hast told him of the snare—
If thou betrayest me beware !
For death shall be the least of all
The ills that on thine head shall fall—
What say I, thou art dear to me,
And doubly dear now shalt thou be,
Thou shalt have power and majesty,
And be more queen in all than I—
Few words are best, be wise, be wise ! "

Withal she turned about her eyes
Once more, and swiftly as a man
Betwixt the garden trees she ran,
Until, her own bower reached at last,
She made good haste, and quickly passed
Unto her secret treasury.
There, hurrying since the time was nigh
For folk to come from meat, she took
From 'twixt the leaves of a great book
A royal scroll, signed, sealed, but blank,
Then, with a hand that never shrank
Or trembled, she the scroll did fill
With these words, writ with clerkly skill.—

*“ Unto the Seneschal, Sir Rafe,
Who holdeth our fair castle safe,
Greeting and health ! O well-beloved,
Know that at this time we are moved
To wed our daughter, so we send
Him who bears this, our perfect friend,
To be her bridegroom ; so do thou
Ask nought of him, since well we know
His race and great nobility,
And how he is most fit to be
Our son ; therefore make no delay,
But wed the twain upon the day
Thou readest this : and see that all
Take oath to him, whate'er shall fall
To do his bidding as our heir ;
So doing still be lief and dear
As I have held thee yet to be.”*

She cast the pen down hastily
At that last letter, for she heard
How even now the people stirred
Within the hall : nor dared she think
What bitter potion she must drink
If now she failed, so falsely bold
That life or death did she enfold
Within its cover, making shift

To seal it with her father's gift,
A signet of cornelian.

Then swiftly down the stairs she ran
And reached the garden ; but her fears
Brought shouts and thunder to her ears,
That were but lazy words of men
Full-fed, far off ; nay, even when
Her limbs caught up her flying gown
The noise seemed loud enough to drown
The twitter of the autumn birds,
And her own muttered breathless words
That to her heart seemed loud indeed.

Yet therewithal she made good speed
And reached the fountain seen of none
Where yet abode her friend alone,
Watching the sleeper, who just now
Turned in his sleep and muttered low.
Therewith fair Agnes saying nought
From out her hand the letter caught ;
And while she leaned against the stone
Stole up to Michael's side alone,
And with a cool, unshrinking hand
Thrust the new scroll deep in his band,
And turned about unto her friend ;
Who having come unto the end
Of all her courage, trembled there
With face upturned for fresher air,
And parted lips grown grey and pale,
And limbs that now began to fail,
And hands wherefrom all strength had gone,
Scarce fresher than the blue-veined stone
That quivering still she strove to clutch.

But when she felt her lady's touch,
Feebly she said, " Go ! let me die
And end this sudden misery
That in such wise has wrapped my life.
I am too weak for such a strife,

So sick I am with shame and fear ;
Would thou hadst never brought me here ! ”

But Agnes took her hand and said,
“ Nay, queen, and must we three be dead
Because thou fearest ? all is safe
If boldly thou wilt face Sir Rafe.”

So saying, did she draw her hence,
Past tree and bower, and high pleached fence
Unto the garden's further end,
And left her there and back did wend
And from the house made haste to get
A gilded maund wherein she set
A flask of ancient island wine,
Ripe fruits and wheaten manchets fine,
And many such a delicate
As goddesses in old time ate
Ere Helen was a Trojan queen ;
So passing through the garden green
She cast her eager eyes again
Upon the spot where he had lain,
But found it empty, so sped on
Till she at last the place had won
Where Cecily lay weak and white
Within that fair bower of delight.

Her straight she made to eat and drink,
And said, “ See now thou dost not shrink
From this thy deed ; let love slay fear
Now, when thy life shall grow so dear,
Each minute should seem loss to thee
If thou for thy felicity
Couldst stay to count them ; for I say,
This day shall be thy happy day.”

Therewith she smiled to see the wine
Embraced by her fingers fine ;
And her sweet face grow bright again
With sudden pleasure after pain.

Again she spoke, “ What is this word
That dreaming, I perchance have heard,

But certainly remember well ;
That some old soothsayer did tell
Strange things unto my lord, the King,
That on thy hand the spousal ring
No Kaiser's son, no King should set,
But one a peasant did beget—
What sayst thou ? ”

But the Queen flushed red ;
“ Such fables I have heard,” she said ;
“ And thou—is it such scathe to me,
The bride of such a man to be ? ”
“ Nay,” said she, “ God will have him King ;
How shall we do a better thing
With this or that one than He can ;
God's friend must be a goodly man.”

But with that word she heard the sound
Of folk who through the mazes wound
Bearing the message ; then she said,
“ Be strong, pluck up thine hardihead,
Speak little, so shall all be well,
For now our own tale will they tell.”

And even as she spoke they came
And all the green place was aflame
With golden raiment of the lords ;
While Cecily, noting not their words,
Rose up to go ; and for her part
By this had fate so steeled her heart,
Scarce otherwise she seemed than when
She passed before the eyes of men
At tourney or high festival.
But when they now had reached the hall,
And up its very steps they went,
Her head a little down she bent ;
Nor raised it till the dais was gained
For fear that love some monster feigned
To be a god, and she should be
Smit by her own bolt wretchedly.

But at the rustling, crowded daïs
She gathered heart her eyes to raise,
And there beheld her love, indeed,
Clad in her father's serving weed,
But proud, and flushed, and calm withal,
Fearless of aught that might befall,
Nor too astonished, for he thought,—
"From point to point my life is brought
Through wonders till it comes to this;
And trouble cometh after bliss,
And I will bear all as I may,
And ever as day passeth day,
My life will hammer from the twain,
Forging a long enduring chain."

But midst these thoughts their young eyes
met,

And every word did he forget
Wherewith men name unhappiness
As read again those words did bless
With double blessings his glad ears.
And if she trembled with her fears,
And if with doubt, and love, and shame,
The rosy colour went and came
In her sweet cheeks and smooth bright brow,
Little did folk think of it now,
But as of maiden modesty,
Shamefaced to see the bridegroom nigh.

And now when Rafe the Seneschal
Had read the message down the Hall,
And turned to her, quite calm again
Her face had grown, and with no pain
She raised her serious eyes to his
Grown soft and pensive with his bliss,
And said,

"Prince, thou art welcome here,
Where all my father loves is dear,
And full trust do I put in thee,
For that so great nobility

He knoweth in thee ; be as kind
As I would be to thee, and find
A happy life from day to day,
Till all our days are passed away."

What more than found the bystanders
He found within this speech of hers,
I know not ; some faint quivering
In the last words ; some little thing
That checked the cold words' even flow.
But yet they set his heart aglow,
And he in turn said eagerly :—

" Surely I count it nought to die
For him who brought me unto this ;
For thee, who givest me this bliss ;
Yea, even dost me such a grace
To look with kind eyes in my face,
And send sweet music to my ears."

But at his words she, mazed with tears,
Seemed faint, and failing quickly, when
Above the low hum of the men
Uprose the sweet bells' sudden clang,
As men unto the chapel rang ;
While just outside the singing folk
Into most heavenly carols broke.
And going softly up the hall
Boys bore aloft the verges tall
Before the Bishop's gold-clad head.

Then forth his bride young Michael led,
And nought to him seemed good or bad
Except the lovely hand he had ;
But she the while was murmuring low,
" If he could know, if he could know,
What love, what love, his love should be ! "

But while mid mirth and minstrelsy
The ancient Castle of the Rose
Such pageant to the autumn shows
The King sits ill at ease at home,

For in these days the news is come
That he who in his line should wed,
Lies in his own town stark and dead,
Slain in a tumult in the street.

Brooding on this he deemed it meet,
Since nigh the day was come when she
Her bridegroom's visage looked to see,
To hold the settled day with her,
And bid her at the least to wear
Dull mourning guise for gold and white.
So on another morning bright,
When the whole promised month was past,
He drew anigh the place at last
Where Michael's dead head, looking down
Upon the highway with a frown,
He doubted not at last to see.
So 'twixt the fruitful greenery
He rode, scarce touched by care the while,
Humming a roundel with a smile.

Withal, ere yet he drew anigh,
He heard their watch-horn sound from high,
Nor wondered, for their wont was so,
And well his banner they might know
Amidst the stubble lands afar :
But now a distant point of war
He seemed to hear, and bade draw rein,
But listening cried, " Push on again !
They do but send forth minstrelsy
Because my daughter thinks to see
The man who lieth on his bier."
So on they passed, till sharp and clear
They heard the pipe and shrill fife sound ;
And restlessly the King glanced round
To see that he had striven for,
The crushing of that Sage's lore,
The last confusion of that fate.

But drawn still nigher to the gate
They turned a sharp bend of the road,

And saw the pageant that abode
The solemn coming of the King.

For first on each side maids did sing,
Dressed in gold raiment ; then there came
The minstrels in their coats of flame ;
And then the many-coloured lords,
The knights' spears, and the swordsmen's swords,
Backed by the glittering wood of bills.

So now, presaging many ills,
The King drew rein, yet none the less
He shrank not from his hardiness,
But thought, " Well, at the worst I die,
And yet perchance long life may lie
Before me—I will hold my peace ;
The dumb man's borders still increase."

But as he strengthened thus his heart
He saw the crowd before him part,
And down the long melodious lane,
Hand locked in hand there passed the twain,
As fair as any earth has found,
Clad as kings' children are, and crowned.
Behind them went the chiefest lords,
And two old knights with sheathed swords
The banners of the kingdom bore.

But now the King had pondered sore,
By when they reached him, though, indeed,
The time was short unto his need,
Betwixt his heart's first startled pang
And those old banner-bearers' clang
Anigh his saddle-bow : but he
Across their heads scowled heavily,
Not saying aught awhile : at last,
Ere any glance at them he cast,
He said, " Whence come ye ? what are ye ?
What play is this ye play to me ? "

None answered,—Cecily, faint and white,
The rather Michael's hand clutched tight,

And seemed to speak, but not one word
The nearest to her could have heard.
Then the King spoke again,—“ Sir Rafe,
Meseems this youngling came here safe
A week ago ? ”

“ Yea, sir,” he said ;
“ Therefore the twain I straight did wed,
E’en as thy letters bound me to.”
“ And thus thou diddest well to do,”

The King said. “ Tell me on what day
Her old life she did put away.”

“ Sire, the eleventh day this is
Since that they gained their earthly bliss,
Quoth old Sir Rafe. The King said nought,
But with his head bowed down in thought,
Stood a long while ; but at the last
Upward a smiling face he cast,
And cried aloud above the folk,
“ Shout for the joining of the yoke
Betwixt these twain ! And thou, fair lord,
Who dost so well my every word,
Nor makest doubt of anything,
Wear thou the collar of thy King ;
And a duke’s banner, cut foursquare,
Henceforth shall men before thee bear
In tourney and in stricken field.

“ But this mine heir shall bear my shield,
Carry my banner, wear my crown,
Ride equal with me through my town,
Sit on the same step of the throne ;
In nothing will I reign alone ;
Nor be ye with him discontent,
For that with little ornament
Of gold and folk to you he came ;
For he is of an ancient name
That needeth not the clink of gold—
The ancientest the world doth hold ;
For in the fertile Asian land,

Where great Damascus now doth stand,
Ages ago his line was born,
Ere yet men knew the gift of corn ;
And there, anigh to Paradise,
His ancestors grew stout and wise ;
And certes he from Asia bore
No little of their piercing lore.

“ Look then to have great happiness,
For every wrong shall he redress.”

Then did the people's shouting drown
His clatter as he leapt adown ;
And taking in each hand a hand
Of the two lovers, now did stand
Betwixt them on the flower-strewn way,
And to himself meanwhile 'gan say,—

“ How many an hour might I have been
Right merry in the gardens green ;
How many a glorious day had I
Made happy with some victory ;
What noble deeds I might have done,
What bright renown my deeds have won ;
What blessings would have made me glad ;
What little burdens had I had ;
What calmness in the hope of praise ;
What joy of well-accomplished days,
If I had let these things alone ;
Nor sought to sit upon my throne
Like God between the cherubim.
But now—but now, my days wax dim,
And all this fairness have I tost
Unto the winds, for nought ! yet will I strive
My little end of life to live ;
Nor will I look behind me more,
Nor forward to the doubtful shore.”

With that he made the sign to turn,
And straight the autumn air did burn

With many a point of steel and gold ;
And through the trees the carol rolled
Once more, until the autumn thrush
Far off 'gan twittering on his bush,
Made mindful of the long-lived spring.

So mid sweet song and tabouring,
And shouts amid the apple-grove,
And soft caressing of his love,
Began the new King Michael's reign.
Nor will the poor folk see again
A king like him on any throne,
Or such good deeds to all men done :
For then, as saith the chronicle,
It was the time, as all men tell,
When scarce a man would stop to gaze
At gold crowns hung above the ways.

HE ended ; and midst those who heard were some
Who, midst his tale, half dreamed they were at home,
Round the great fire upon the winter night ;
And, with the memory of the fresh delight
Wherewith they first had heard that story told,
Forgetting not they were grown weak and old,
Yet felt as if they had at least grown grey
Within the land left for so many a day.
He, with the gestures they were wont to see,
So told his tale, so strange with eld was he,
Just so he stammered, and in just such wise
He sighed, beginning fresh, as their young eyes,
Their ears, in happy days passed long ago,
Had ever noted other old men do,
When they, full filled with their quick-coming joys
Would gaze on old folk as on carven toys.

But he being silent, silently awhile
They mused on these things, masking with a smile
The vain regrets that in their hearts arose,
The while with eager talk the young folk chose
The parts that pleased them ; but their elder hosts
Falling to talk, yet noted well the ghosts
Of old desires within their wasted eyes
Till one by one the fresh-stirred memories,
So bitter sweet, flickered and died away ;
And as old men may do, whose hopes grew grey
Before their beards, they made a little mirth
Until the great moon rose upon the earth.

APRIL

WHEN April-tide was melting into May,
Within a hall that midst the gardens lay
These elders met, and having feasted well,
The time came round the wonted tale to tell.
Then spake a Wanderer : "Sirs, it happed to me,
Long years ago, to cross the narrow sea
That 'twixt us Dronheimers and England lies ;
Young was I then, and little thought these eyes
Should see so many lands ere all was done.

"But this land was a fair and fertile one,
As at that time, for April-tide it was,
Even as now ; well, sirs, it came to pass
That to this town or that we took our way,
Or in some abbey's guesten-chamber lay,
And many tales we heard, some false, some true,
Of the ill deeds our fathers used to do
Within that land ; and still the tale would end,
'Yet did the Saint his Holy House defend ;'
Or, 'Sirs, their fury all was nought and vain,
And by our Earl the pirate-king was slain.'
God wot, I laughed full often in my sleeve,
And could have told them stories, by their leave,
With other endings : but I held my tongue.
Let each king's deed in his own land be sung,
And then will lies stretch far. Besides, these men
Were puffed up with their luck and glory then,
For at that tide, within the land of France,
Unto their piping must all people dance.—
—But let that pass, for Captain Rolf has told
How, on the way, their king he did behold.

"For other tales they told, and one of these
Not all the washing of the troublous seas,
Not all the changeful days whereof ye know,

Have swept from out my memory ; even so
Small things far off will be remembered clear
When matters both more weighty, and more near,
Are waxing dim to us. I, who have seen
So many lands, and midst such marvels been,
Clearer than these abodes of outland men,
Can see above the green and unburnt fen
The little houses of an English town,
Cross-timbered, thatched with fen-reeds coarse and
brown,
And high o'er these, three gables, great and fair,
That slender rods of columns do upbear
Over the minster doors, and imagery
Of kings, and flowers no summer field doth see,
Wrought on those gables.—Yea, I heard withal,
In the fresh morning air, the trowels fall
Upon the stone, a thin noise far away ;
For high up wrought the masons on that day,
Since to the monks that house seemed scarcely well
Till they had set a spire or pinnacle
Each side the great porch. In that burgh I heard
This tale, and late have set down every word
That I remembered, when the thoughts would come
Of what we did in our deserted home,
And of the days, long past, when we were young,
Nor knew the cloudy woes that o'er us hung.
And howsoever I am now grown old,
Yet is it still the tale I then heard told
Within the guest-house of that minster-close,
Whose walls, like cliffs new-made, before us rose.”

THE PROUD KING

ARGUMENT

A certain king, blinded by pride, thought that he was something more than man, if not equal to God ; but such a judgment fell on him that none knew him for king, and he suffered many things, till in the end, humbling himself, he regained his kingdom and honour.

IN a far country that I cannot name,
And on a year long ages past away,
A King there dwelt, in rest and ease and fame,
And richer than the Emperor is to-day :
The very thought of what this man might say
From dusk to dawn kept many a lord awake,
For fear of him did many a great man quake.

Young was he when he first sat on the throne,
And he was wedded to a noble wife,
But at the daïs must he sit alone,
Nor durst a man speak to him for his life,
Except with leave : nought knew he change or strife,
But that the years passed silently away,
And in his black beard gathered specks of grey.

Now so it chanced, upon a May morning,
Wakeful he lay when yet low was the sun,
Looking distraught at many a royal thing,
And counting up his titles one by one,
And thinking much of things that he had done ;

For full of life he felt, and hale and strong,
And knew that none durst say when he did wrong.

For no man now could give him dread or doubt,
The land was 'neath his sceptre far and wide,
And at his beck would well-armed myriads shout.
Then swelled his vain, unthinking heart with pride,
Until at last he raised him up and cried,
“What need have I for temple or for priest?
Am I not God, whiles that I live at least?”

And yet withal that dead his fathers were,
He needs must think that quick the years pass by;
But he, who seldom yet had seen Death near
Or heard his name, said, “Still I may not die
Though underneath the earth my fathers lie;
My sire indeed was called a mighty king,
Yet in regard of mine, a little thing

“His kingdom was; moreover, his grandsire
To him was but a prince of narrow lands,
Whose father, though to things he did aspire
Beyond most men, a great knight of his hands,
Yet ruled some little town where now there stands
The kennel of my dogs; then may not I
Rise higher yet, nor like poor wretches die?”

“Since up the ladder ever we have gone
Step after step nor fallen back again;
And there are tales of people who have won
A life enduring, without care or pain,
Or any man to make their wishes vain;
Perchance this prize unwitting now I hold;
For times change fast, the world is waxen old.”

So mid these thoughts once more he fell asleep,
And when he woke again high was the sun,

Then quickly from his gold bed did he leap,
And of his former thoughts remembered none,
But said, " To-day through green woods will we run,
Nor shall to-day be worse than yesterday,
But better it may be, for game and play."

So for the hunt was he apparelled,
And forth he rode with heart right well at ease ;
And many a strong, deep-chested hound they led
Over the dewy grass betwixt the trees,
And fair white horses fit for the white knees
Of Her the ancients fabled rides a-nights
Betwixt the setting and the rising lights.

Now following up a mighty hart and swift
The King rode long upon that morning tide,
And since his horse was worth a kingdom's gift,
It chanced him all his servants to outride,
Until unto a shaded river-side
He came alone at hottest of the sun,
When all the freshness of the day was done.

Dismounting there, and seeing so far adown
The red-finned fishes o'er the gravel play,
It seemed that moment worth his royal crown
To hide there from the burning of the day,
Wherefore he did off all his rich array,
And tied his horse unto a neighbouring tree,
And in the water sported leisurely.

But when he was fulfilled of this delight
He gat him to the bank well satisfied,
And thought to do on him his raiment bright
And homeward to his royal house to ride ;
But 'mazed and angry, looking far and wide
Nought saw he of his horse and rich attire,
And 'gainst the thief 'gan threaten vengeance dire.

But little help his fury was to him,
So lustily he 'gan to shout and cry.
None answered ; still the lazy chub did swim
By inches 'gainst the stream ; away did fly
The small pied bird, but nathless stayed anigh,
And o'er the stream still plied his fluttering trade,
Of such a helpless man not much afraid.

Weary of crying in that lonely place
He ceased at last, and thinking what to do,
E'en as he was, up stream he set his face,
Since not far off a certain house he knew
Where dwelt his ranger, a lord leal and true,
Who many a bounty at his hands had had,
And now to do him ease would be right glad.

Thither he hastened on, and as he went
The hot sun sorely burned his naked skin,
The whiles he thought, " When he to me has lent
Fine raiment, and at ease I sit within
His coolest chamber clad in linen thin,
And drinking wine, the best that he has got,
I shall forget this troublous day and hot."

Now note, that while he thus was on his way,
And still his people for their master sought,
There met them one who in the King's array
Bestrode his very horse, and as they thought
Was none but he in good time to them brought,
Therefore they hailed him King, and so all rode
From out the forest to his fair abode.

And there in royal guise he sat at meat,
Served, as his wont was, 'neath the canopy,
And there the hounds fawned round about his feet,
And there that city's elders did he see,
And with his lords took counsel what should be ;

And there at supper when the day waxed dim
The Queen within his chamber greeted him.

LEAVE we him there ; for to the ranger's gate
The other came, and on the horn he blew,
Till peered the wary porter through the grate
To see if he, perchance, the blower knew,
Before he should the wicket-gate undo ;
But when he saw him standing there, he cried,
" What dost thou, friend, to show us all thine hide ?

" We list not buy to-day or flesh or fell ;
Go home and get thyself a shirt at least,
If thou wouldst aught, for saith our vicar well,
That God hath given clothes e'en to the beast.
Therewith he turned to go, but as he ceased
The King cried out, " Open, O foolish man !
I am thy lord and King, Jovinian ;

" Go now, and tell thy master I am here
Desiring food and clothes, and in this plight,
And then hereafter need'st thou have no fear,
Because thou didst not know me at first sight."
" Yea, yea, I am but dreaming in the night,"
The carle said, " and I bid thee, friend, to dream,
Come through ! here is no gate, it doth but seem."

With that his visage vanished from the grate ;
But when the King now found himself alone,
He hurled himself against the mighty gate,
And beat upon it madly with a stone,
Half wondering midst his rage how any one
Could live, if longed-for things he chanced to lack ;
But midst all this, at last the gate flew back,

And there the porter stood, brown-bill in hand,
And said, " Ah, fool, thou makest this ado,

Wishing before my lord's high seat to stand ;
Thou shalt be gladder soon hereby to go,
Or surely nought of handy blows I know.
Come, willy-nilly, thou shalt tell this tale
Unto my lord, if aught it may avail."

With that his staff he handled, as if he
Would smite the King, and said, " Get on before
St. Mary ! now thou goest full leisurely,
Who, erewhile, fain wouldst batter down the door.
See now, if ere this matter is passed o'er,
I come to harm, yet thou shalt not escape,
Thy back is broad enow to pay thy jape."

Half blind with rage the King before him passed,
But nought of all he doomed him to durst say,
Lest he from rest nigh won should yet be cast,
So with a swelling heart he took his way,
Thinking right soon his shame to cast away,
And the carle followed still, ill satisfied
With such a wretched losel to abide.

Fair was the ranger's house and new and white,
And by the King built scarce a year ago,
And carved about for this same lord's delight
With woodland stories deftly wrought in stone ;
There oft the King was wont to come alone,
For much he loved this lord, who erst had been
A landless squire, a servant of the Queen.

Now long a lord and clad in rich attire,
In his fair hall he sat before the wine
Watching the evening sun's yet burning fire,
Through the close branches of his pleasance shine,
In that mood when man thinks himself divine,
Remembering not whereto we all must come,
Not thinking aught but of his happy home.

From just outside loud mocking merriment
He heard midst this ; and therewithal a squire
Came hurrying up, his laughter scarcely spent,
Who said, " My lord, a man in such attire
As Adam's, ere he took the devil's hire,
Who saith that thou wilt know him for the King,
Up from the gate John Porter needs must bring.

" He to the King is nothing like in aught
But that his beard he weareth in such guise
As doth my lord : wilt thou that he be brought ?
Perchance some treason 'neath his madness lies."
" Yea," saith the ranger, " that may well be wise,
But haste, for this eve am I well at ease,
Nor would be wearied with such folk as these."

Then went the squire, and coming back again,
The porter and the naked King brought in,
Who thinking now that this should end his pain,
Forgot his fury and the porter's sin,
And said, " Thou wonderest how I came to win
This raiment, that kings long have ceased to wear,
Since Noah's flood has altered all the air ?

" Well, thou shalt know, but first I pray thee, Hugh,
Reach me that cloak that lieth on the board,
For certes, though thy folk are leal and true,
It seemeth that they deem a mighty lord
Is made by crown, and silken robe, and sword ;
Lo, such are borel folk ; but thou and I
Fail not to know the signs of majesty.

" Thou risest not ! thou lookest strange on me !
Ah, what is this ? Who reigneth in my stead ?
How long hast thou been plotting secretly ?
Then slay me now, for if I be not dead
Armies will rise up when I nod my head.

Slay me !—or cast thy treachery away,
And have anew my favour from this day.”

“ Why should I tell thee that thou ne’er wast king ? ”
The ranger said, “ Thou knowest not what I say ;
Poor man, I pray God help thee in this thing,
And ere thou diest send thee some good day ;
Nor hence unholpen shalt thou go away.
Good fellows, this poor creature is but mad,
Take him, and in a coat let him be clad ;

“ And give him meat and drink, and on this night
Beneath some roof of ours let him abide,
For some day God may set his folly right.”
Then spread the King his arms abroad and cried,
“ Woe to thy food, thy house, and thee betide,
Thou loathsome traitor ! Get ye from the hall,
Lest smitten by God’s hand this roof should fall ;

“ Yea, if the world be but an idle dream,
And God deals nought with it, yet shall ye see
Red flame from out these carven windows stream.
I, I, will burn this vile place utterly,
And strewn with salt the poisonous earth shall be,
That such a wretch of such a man has made,
That so such Judases may grow afraid.”

Thus raving, those who held him he shook off
And rushed from out the hall, nigh mad indeed,
And gained the gate, not heeding blow or scoff,
Nor longer of his nakedness took heed,
But ran, he knew not where, at headlong speed
Till, when at last his strength was fully spent,
Worn out, he fell beneath a woody bent.

But for the ranger, left alone in peace,
He bade his folk bring in the minstrelsy ;

And thinking of his life, and fair increase
Of all his goods, a happy man was he,
And towards his master felt right lovingly,
And said, " This luckless madman will avail
When next I see the King for one more tale."

MEANWHILE the real King by the road-side lay,
Panting, confused, scarce knowing if he dreamed,
Until at last, when vanished was the day,
Through the dark night far off a bright light gleamed ;
Which growing quickly, down the road there streamed
The glare of torches, held by men who ran
Before the litter of a mighty man.

These mixed with soldiers soon the road did fill,
And on their harness could the King behold
The badge of one erst wont to do his will,
A counsellor, a gatherer-up of gold,
Who underneath his rule had now grown old :
Then wrath and bitterness so filled his heart,
That from his wretched lair he needs must start.

And o'er the clatter shrilly did he cry,
" Well met, Duke Peter ! ever art thou wise ;
Surely thou wilt not let a day go by
Ere thou art good friends with mine enemies ;
O fit to rule within a land of lies,
Go on thy journey, make thyself more meet
To sit in hell beneath the devil's feet ! "

But as he ceased a soldier drew anear,
And smote him flatling with his sheathed sword,
And said, " Speak louder, that my lord may hear
And give thee wages for thy ribald word !
Come forth, for I must show thee to my lord,

For he may think thee more than mad indeed,
Who of men's ways has taken wondrous heed."

Now was the litter stayed midmost the road,
And round about, the torches in a ring
Were gathered, and their flickering light now glowed
In gold and gems and many a lordly thing,
And showed that face well known unto the King,
That, smiling yesterday, right humble words
Had spoken midst the concourse of the lords.

But now he said, "Man, thou wert cursing me
If these folk heard aright ; what wilt thou then,
Deem'st thou that I have done some wrong to thee,
Or hast thou scathe from any of my men ?
In any case tell all thy tale again
When on the judgment-seat thou see'st me sit,
And I will give no careless ear to it."

"The night is dark, and in the summer wind
The torches flicker ; canst thou see my face ?
Bid them draw nigher yet, and call to mind
Who gave thee all thy riches and thy place—
—Well ;—If thou canst, deny me, with such grace
As by the fire-light Peter swore of old,
When in that Maundy-week the night was cold—

"—Alas ! canst thou not see I am the King ? "
So spoke he, as their eyes met mid the blaze,
And the King saw the dread foreshadowing
Within the elder's proud and stony gaze,
Of what those lips, thin with the lapse of days,
Should utter now ; nor better it befell ;—
"Friend, a strange story thou art pleased to tell ;

"Thy luck it is thou tellest it to me,
Who deem thee mad and let thee go thy way :

The King is not a man to pity thee,
Or on thy folly thy fool's tale to lay :
Poor fool ! take this, and with the light of day
Buy food and raiment of some labouring clown,
And by my counsel keep thee from the town,

“ For fear thy madness break out in some place
Where folk thy body to the judge must hale,
And then indeed wert thou in evil case—
Press on, sirs ! or the time will not avail.”
—There stood the King, with limbs that 'gan to fail,
Speechless, and holding in his trembling hand
A coin new stamped for people of the land ;

Thereon, with sceptre, crown, and royal robe,
The image of a King, himself, was wrought ;
His jewelled feet upon a quartered globe,
As though by him all men were vain and nought.
One moment the red glare the silver caught,
As the lord ceased, the next his hurrying folk
The flaring circle round the litter broke.

The next, their shadows barred a patch of light,
Fast vanishing, all else around was black ;
And the poor wretch, left lonely with the night,
Muttered, “ I wish the day would ne'er come back,
If all that once I had I now must lack :
Ah God ! how long is it since I was King,
Nor lacked enough to wish for anything ? ”

Then down the lonely road he wandered yet,
Following the vanished lights, he scarce knew why,
Till he began his sorrows to forget,
And, steeped in drowsiness, at last drew nigh
A grassy bank, where, worn with misery,
He slept the dreamless sleep of weariness,
That many a time such wretches' eyes will bless.

BUT at the dawn he woke, nor knew at first
What ugly chain of grief had brought him there,
Nor why he felt so wretched and accursed ;
At last remembering, the fresh morning air,
The rising sun, and all things fresh and fair,
Yet caused some little hope in him to rise,
That end might come to these new miseries.

So looking round about, he saw that he
To his own city gates was come anear ;
Then he arose and going warily,
And hiding now and then for very fear
Of folk who bore their goods and country cheer
Unto the city's market, at the last
Unto a stone's-throw of the gate he passed.

But when he drew unto the very gate,
Into the throng of country-folk he came
Who for the opening of the door did wait,
Of whom some mocked, and some cried at him shame,
And some would know his country and his name ;
But one into his wagon drew him up,
And gave him milk from out a beechen cup,

And asked him of his name and misery ;
Then in his throat a swelling passion rose,
Which yet he swallowed down, and, " Friend," said he,
" Last night I had the hap to meet the foes
Of God and man, who robbed me, and with blows
Stripped off my weed and left me on the way :
Thomas the Pilgrim am I called to-day.

" A merchant am I of another town,
And rich enow to pay thee for thy deed,
If at the King's door thou wilt set me down,
For there a squire I know, who at my need
Will give me food and drink, and fitting weed.

What is thy name ? in what place dost thou live ?
That I some day great gifts to thee may give."

" Fair sir," the carle said, " I am poor enow,
Though certes food I lack not easily ;
My name is Christopher a-Green ; I sow
A little orchard set with bush and tree,
And ever there the kind land keepeth me,
For I, now fifty, from a little boy
Have dwelt thereon, and known both grief and joy.

" The house my grandsire built there has grown old,
And certainly a bounteous gift it were
If thou shouldst give me just enough of gold
To build it new ; nor shouldst thou lack my prayer
For such a gift." " Nay, friend, have thou no care,"
The King said : " this is but a little thing
To me, who oft am richer than the King."

Now as they talked the gate was opened wide,
And toward the palace went they through the street,
And Christopher walked ever by the side
Of his rough wain, where midst the May-flowers sweet
Jovinian lay, that folk whom they might meet
Might see him not to mock at his bare skin :
So shortly to the King's door did they win.

Then through the open gate Jovinian ran
Of the first court, and no man stayed him there ;
But as he reached the second gate, a man
Of the King's household, seeing him all bare
And bloody, cried out, " Whither dost thou fare ?
Sure thou art seventy times more mad than mad,
Or else some magic potion thou hast had,

" Whereby thou fear'st not steel or anything."
" But," said the King, " good fellow, I know thee :
And can it be thou knowest not thy King ?

Nay, thou shalt have a good reward of me,
That thou wouldst rather have than ten years' fee,
If thou wilt clothe me in fair weed again,
For now to see my council am I fain."

"Out, ribald!" quoth the fellow: "What say'st thou?"

Thou art my lord, whom God reward and bless?
Truly before long shalt thou find out how
John Hangman cureth ill folk's wilfulness;
Yea, from his scourge the blood has run for less
Than that which now thou sayest: nay, what say I?
For lighter words have I seen fall men die.

"Come now, the sergeants to this thing shall see!"
So to the guard-room was Jovinian brought,
Where his own soldiers mocked him bitterly,
And all his desperate words they heeded nought;
Until at last there came to him this thought,
That never from this misery should he win,
But, spite of all his struggles, die therein.

And terrible it seemed, that everything
So utterly was changed since yesterday,
That these who were the soldiers of the King,
Ready to lie down in the common way
Before him, nor durst rest if he bade play,
Now stood and mocked him, knowing not the face
At whose command each man there had his place.

"Ah, God!" said he, "is this another earth
From that whereon I stood two days ago?
Or else in sleep have I had second birth?
Or among mocking shadows do I go,
Unchanged myself of flesh and fell, although
My fair weed I have lost and royal gear?
And meanwhile all are changed that I meet here;

"And yet in heart and nowise outwardly."
Amid his wretched thoughts two sergeants came,
Who said, "Hold, sirs! because the King would see
The man who thus so rashly brings him shame,
By taking his high style and spotless name,
That never has been questioned ere to-day.
Come, fool! needs is it thou must go our way."

So at the sight of him all men turned round,
As 'twixt these two across the courts he went,
With downcast head and hands together bound;
While from the windows maid and varlet leant,
And through the morning air fresh laughter sent;
Until unto the threshold they were come
Of the great hall within that kingly home.

Therewith right fast Jovinian's heart must beat,
As now he thought, "Lo, here shall end the strife;
For either shall I sit on mine own seat,
Known unto all, soldier and lord and wife,
Or else is this the ending of my life,
And no man henceforth shall remember me,
And a vain name in records shall I be."

Therewith he raised his head up, and beheld
One clad in gold set on his royal throne,
Gold-crowned, whose hand the ivory sceptre held;
And underneath him sat the Queen alone,
Ringed round with standing lords, of whom not one
Did aught but utmost reverence unto him;
Then did Jovinian shake in every limb.

Yet midst amaze and rage to him it seemed
This man was nowise like him in the face;
But with a marvellous glory his head gleamed,
As though an angel sat in that high place,
Where erst he sat like all his royal race,—
—But their eyes met, and with a stern, calm brow
The shining one cried out, "And where art thou?"

"Where art thou, robber of my majesty?"
"Was I not King," he said, "but yesterday?
And though to-day folk give my place to thee,
I am Jovinian; yes, though none gainsay,
If on these very stones thou shouldst me slay,
And though no friend be left for me to moan,
I am Jovinian still, and King alone."

Then said that other, "O thou foolish man,
King was I yesterday, and long before,
Nor is my name aught but Jovinian,
Whom in this house the Queen my mother bore,
Unto my longing father, for right sore
Was I desired before I saw the light;
Thou, fool, art first to speak against my right.

"And surely well thou meritest to die;
Yet ere that I bid lead thee unto death
Hearken to these my lords that stand anigh,
And what this faithful Queen beside me saith,
Then may'st thou many a year hence draw thy breath,
If these should stammer in their speech one whit:
Behold this face, lords, look ye well on it!

"Thou, O fair Queen, say now whose face is this!"
Then cried they, "Hail, O Lord Jovinian!
Long mayst thou live!" and the Queen knelt to kiss
His gold-shod feet, and through her face there ran
Sweet colour, as she said, "Thou art the man
By whose side I have lain for many a year,
Thou art my lord Jovinian lief and dear."

Then said he, "O thou wretch, hear now and see!
What thing should hinder me to slay thee now?
And yet indeed, such mercy is in me,
If thou wilt kneel down humbly and avow
Thou art no King, but base-born, as I know
Thou art indeed, in mine house shalt thou live,
And as thy service is, so shalt thou thrive."

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But the unhappy King laughed bitterly,
The red blood rose to flush his visage wan
Where erst the grey of death began to be ;
"Thou liest," he said, "I am Jovinian,
Come of great Kings ; nor am I such a man
As still to live when all delight is gone,
As thou might'st do, who sittest on my throne."

No answer made the other for a while,
But sat and gazed upon him steadfastly,
Until across his face there came a smile,
Where scorn seemed mingled with some great pity.
And then he said, "Nathless thou shalt not die,
But live on as thou mayst, a lowly man
Forgetting thou wast once Jovinian."

Then wildly round the hall Jovinian gazed,
Turning about to many a well-known face,
But none of all his folk seemed grieved or mazed,
But stood unmoved, each in his wonted place ;
There were the Lords, the Marshal with his mace,
The Chamberlain, the Captain of the Guard,
Grey-headed, with his wrinkled face and hard,

That had peered down so many a lane of war ;
There stood the grave ambassadors arow,
Come from half-conquered lands ; without the bar
The foreign merchants gazed upon the show,
Willing new things of that great land to know ;
Nor was there any doubt in any man
That the gold throne still held Jovinian.

Yea, as the sergeants laid their hands on him,
The mighty hound that crouched before the throne
Flew at him fain to tear him limb from limb,
Though in the woods the brown bear's dying groan
He and that beast had often heard alone.
"Ah !" muttered he, "take thou thy wages too,
Worship the risen sun as these men do."

They thrust him out, and as he passed the door,
The murmur of the stately court he heard
Behind him, and soft footfalls on the floor,
And, though by this somewhat his skin was seared,
Hung back at the rough eager wind afeard ;
But from the place they dragged him through the gate,
Wherethrough he oft had rid in royal state.

Then down the streets they led him, where of old,
He, coming back from some well-finished war,
Had seen the line of flashing steel and gold
Wind upwards 'twixt the houses from the bar,
While clashed the bells from wreathed spires afar,
Now moaning, as they haled him on, he said,
" God and the world against one lonely head ! "

BUT soon, the bar being past, they loosed their hold,
And said, " Thus saith by us our Lord the King,
Dwell now in peace, but yet be not so bold
To come again, or to thy lies to cling,
Lest unto thee there fall a worser thing ;
And for ourselves we bid thee ever pray
For him who has been good to thee this day."

Therewith they turned away into the town,
And still he wandered on and knew not where,
Till, stumbling at the last, he fell adown,
And looking round beheld a brook right fair,
That ran in pools and shallows here and there,
And on the further side of it a wood,
Nigh which a lowly clay-built hovel stood.

Gazing thereat, it came into his mind
A priest dwelt there, a hermit wise and old,
Whom he had ridden oftentimes to find,
In days when first the sceptre he did hold,
And unto whom his mind he oft had told,

And had good counsel from him, though indeed
A scanty crop had sprung from that good seed.

Therefore he passed the brook with heavy cheer
And toward the little house went speedily,
And at the door knocked, trembling with his fear,
Because he thought, " Will he remember me ?
If not, within me must there surely be
Some devil who turns everything to ill,
And makes my wretched body do his will."

So, while such doleful things as this he thought,
There came unto the door the holy man,
Who said, " Good friend, what tidings hast thou
brought ? "
" Father," he said, " knowest thou Jovinian ?
Know'st thou me not, made naked, poor, and wan ?
Alas, O father ! am I not the King,
The rightful lord of thee and everything ? "

" Nay, thou art mad to tell me such a tale ! "
The hermit said ; " if thou seek'st soul's health here,
Right little will such words as this avail ;
It were a better deed to shrive thee clear,
And take the pardon Christ has bought so dear,
Than to an ancient man such mocks to say
That would be fitter for a Christmas play."

So to his hut he got him back again,
And fell the unhappy King upon his knees,
And unto God at last he did complain,
Saying, " Lord God, what bitter things are these ?
What hast Thou done, that every man that sees
This wretched body, of my death is fain ?
O Lord God, give me back myself again !

" E'en if therewith I needs must die straightway.
Indeed I know that since upon the earth

I first did go, I ever day by day
Have grown the worse, who was of little worth
E'en at the best time since my helpless birth.
And yet it pleased Thee once to make me King,
Why hast Thou made me now this wretched thing ?

“ Why am I hated so of every one ?
Wilt Thou not let me live my life again,
Forgetting all the deeds that I have done,
Forgetting my old name, and honours vain,
That I may cast away this lonely pain ?
Yet if Thou wilt not, help me in this strife,
That I may pass my little span of life,

“ Not made a monster by unhappiness.
What shall I say ? Thou mad'st me weak of will,
Thou wrapped'st me in ease and carelessness,
And yet, as some folk say, Thou lovest me still ;
Look down, of folly I have had my fill,
And am but now as first Thou madest me,
Weak, yielding clay to take impress of Thee.”

So said he weeping, and but scarce had done,
When yet again came forth that hermit old,
And said, “ Alas ! my master and my son,
Is this a dream my wearied eyes behold ?
What doleful wonder now shall I be told,
Of that ill world that I so long have left ?
What thing thy glory from thee has bereft ? ”

A strange surprise of joy therewith there came
To that worn heart ; he said, “ For some great sin
The Lord my God has brought me unto shame ;
I am unknown of servants, wife, and kin,
Unknown of all the lords that stand within
My father's house ; nor didst thou know me more
When e'en just now I stood before thy door.

" Now since thou know'st me, surely God is good,
And will not slay me, and good hope I have
Of help from Him that died upon the rood,
And is a mighty Lord to slay and save :
So now again these blind men will I brave,
If thou wilt give me of thy poorest weed,
And some rough food, the which I sorely need ;

" Then of my sins thou straight shall shrive me clean."
Then weeping said the holy man, " Dear lord,
What heap of woes upon thine head has been ;
Enter, O King, take this rough gown and cord,
And scanty food my hovel can afford ;
And tell me everything thou hast to say ;
And then the High God speed thee on thy way."

So when in coarse serge raiment he was clad,
He told him all his pride had made him think ;
And showed him of his life both good and bad ;
And then being houselled, did he eat and drink,
While in the wise man's heart his words did sink,
For, " God be praised ! " he thought, " I am no king,
Who scarcely shall do right in anything ! "

Then he made ready for the King his ass,
And bade again, God speed him on the way,
And down the road the King made haste to pass
As it was growing toward the end of day,
With sober joy for troubles passed away ;
But trembling still, as onward he did ride,
Meeting few folk upon that even-tide.

So to the city gate being come at last,
He noted there two ancient warders stand,
Whereof one looked askance as he went past,
And whispered low behind his held-up hand
Unto his mate, " The King, who gave command

That if disguised he passed this gate to-day,
No reverence we should do him on the way."

Thereat with joy, Jovinian smiled again,
And so passed onward quickly down the street ;
And well-nigh was he eased of all his pain
When he beheld the folk that he might meet
Gaze hard at him, as though they fain would greet
His well-known face, but durst not, knowing well
He would not any of his state should tell.

Withal unto the palace being come,
He lighted down thereby and entered,
And once again it seemed his royal home,
For folk again before him bowed the head ;
And to him came a squire, who softly said,
" The Queen awaits thee, O my lord the King,
Within the little hall where minstrels sing,

" Since there thou badst her meet thee on this night."
" Lead on then ! " said the King, and in his heart
He said, " Perfoy all goeth more than right
And I am King again ; " but with a start
He thought of him who played the kingly part
That morn, yet said, " If God will have it so
This man like all the rest my face will know."

So in the Little Hall the Queen he found,
Asleep, as one a spell binds suddenly ;
For her fair broidery lay upon the ground,
And in her lap her open hand did lie,
The silken-threaded needle close thereby ;
And by her stood that image of the King
In rich apparel, crown and signet-ring.

But when the King stepped forth with angry eye
And would have spoken, came a sudden light,

And changed was that other utterly ;
For he was clad in robe of shining white,
Inwrought with flowers of unnamed colours bright,
Girt with a marvellous girdle, and whose hem
Fell to his naked feet and shone in them ;

And from his shoulders did two wings arise,
That with the swaying of his body, played
This way and that ; of strange and lovely dyes
Their feathers were, and wonderfully made :
And now he spoke, " O King, be not dismayed,
Or think my coming here so strange to be,
For oft ere this have I been close to thee.

" And now thou knowest in how short a space
The God that made the world can unmake thee,
And though He alter in no whit thy face,
Can make all folk forget thee utterly,
That thou to-day a nameless wretch mayst be,
Who yesterday woke up without a peer,
The wide world's marvel and the people's fear.

" Behold, thou oughtest to thank God for this,
That on the hither side of thy dark grave
Thou well hast learned how great a God He is
Who from the heavens countless rebels drave,
Yet turns Himself such folk as thee to save ;
For many a man thinks nought at all of it,
Till in a darksome land he comes to sit,

" Lamenting everything : so do not thou !
For inasmuch as thou thoughtst not to die
This thing may happen to thee even now,
Because the day unspeakable draws nigh,
When bathed in unknown flame all things shall lie ;
And if thou art upon God's side that day,
Unslain, thine earthly part shall pass away.

“ Or if thy body in the grave must rot,
Well mayst thou see how small a thing is this,
Whose pain of yesterday now hurts thee not,
Now thou hast come again to earthly bliss,
Though bitter-sweet thou knowest well this is,
And though no coming day can ever see
Ending of happiness where thou mayst be.

“ Now must I go, nor wilt thou see me more
Until the day when, unto thee at least,
This world is gone, and an unmeasured shore,
Where all is wonderful and changed, thou seest :
Therefore, farewell ! at council and at feast
Thy nobles shalt thou meet as thou hast done,
Nor wilt thou more be strange to any one.”

So scarce had he done speaking, ere his wings
Within the doorway of the hall did gleam,
And then he vanished quite ; and all these things
Unto Jovinian little more did seem
Than some distinct and well-remembered dream,
From which one wakes amidst a feverish night,
Taking the moonshine for the morning light.

Silent he stood, not moving for a while,
Pondering o'er all these wondrous things, until
The Queen arose from sleep, and with a smile
Said, “ O fair lord, your great men by your will
E'en as I speak the banquet-chamber fill,
To greet thee amidst joy and revelling,
Wilt thou not therefore meet them as a King ? ”

So from that place of marvels having gone,
Half mazed, he soon was clad in rich array,
And sat thereafter on his kingly throne,
As though no other had sat there that day ;
Nor did a soul of all his household say

A word about the man who on that morn
Had stood there, naked, helpless, and forlorn.

But ever day by day the thought of it
Within Jovinian's heart the clearer grew,
As o'er his head the ceaseless time did flit,
And everything still towards its ending drew,
New things becoming old, and old things new ;
Till, when a moment of eternity
Had passed, grey-headed did Jovinian lie

One sweet May morning, wakeful in his bed ;
And thought, " That day is thirty years a-gone
Since useless folly came into my head,
Whereby, before the steps of mine own throne,
I stood in helpless agony alone,
And of the wondrous things that there befell,
When I am gone there will be none to tell :

" No man is now alive who thinks that he,
Who bade thrust out the madman on that tide,
Was other than the King they used to see :
Long years have passed now since the hermit died,
So must I tell the tale, ere by his side
I lie, lest it be unrecorded quite,
Like a forgotten dream in morning light.

" Yea, lest I die ere night come, this same day
Unto some scribe will I tell everything,
That it may lie when I am gone away,
Stored up within the archives of the King ;
And may God grant the words thereof may ring
Like His own voice in the next comer's ears !
Whereby his folk shall shed the fewer tears."

So it was done, and at the King's command
A clerk that day did note it every whit,

And after by a man of skilful hand
In golden letters fairly was it writ ;
Yet little heed the new King took of it
That filled the throne when King Jovinian died,
So much did all things feed his swelling pride.

But whether God chastised him in his turn,
And he grew wise thereafter, I know not ;
I think by eld alone he came to learn
How lowly on some day must be his lot.
But ye, O Kings, think all that ye have got
To be but gawds cast out upon some heap,
And stolen the while the Master was asleep.

THE story done, for want of happier things,
Some men must even fall to talk of kings ;
Some trouble of a far-off Grecian isle,
Some hard Sicilian craftsman's cruel guile
Whereby he raised himself to be as God,
Till good men slew him ; the fell Persian rod
As blighting as the deadly pestilence,
The brazen net of armed men from whence
Was no escape ; the fir-built Norway hall
Filled with the bonders waiting for the fall
Of the great roof whereto the torch is set ;
The laughing mouth, beneath the eyes still wet
With more than sea-spray, as the well-loved land
The freeman still looks back on, while his hand
Clutches the tiller, and the eastern breeze
Grows fresh and fresher ; many things like these
They talked about, till they seemed young again,
Remembering what a glory and a gain
Their fathers deemed the death of kings to be.
And yet amidst it, some smiled doubtfully
For thinking how few men escape the yoke,
From this or that man's hand, and how most folk
Must needs be kings and slaves the while they live,
And take from this man, and to that man give
Things hard enow. Yet as they mused, again
The minstrels raised some high heroic strain
That led men on to battle in old times ;
And midst the glory of its mingling rhymes,
Their hard hearts softened, and strange thoughts arose
Of some new end to all life's cruel foes.

PROSE ROMANCES

THE STORY OF THE UNKNOWN CHURCH

I WAS the master-mason of a church that was built more than six hundred years ago ; it is now two hundred years since that church vanished from the face of the earth ; it was destroyed utterly,—no fragment of it was left ; not even the great pillars that bore up the tower at the cross, where the choir used to join the nave. No one knows now even where it stood, only in this very autumn-tide, if you knew the place, you would see the heaps made by the earth-covered ruins heaving the yellow corn into glorious waves, so that the place where my church used to be is as beautiful now as when it stood in all its splendour. I do not remember very much about the land where my church was ; I have quite forgotten the name of it, but I know it was very beautiful, and even now, while I am thinking of it, comes a flood of old memories, and I almost seem to see it again,—that old beautiful land ! only dimly do I see it in spring and summer and winter, but I see it in autumn-tide clearly now ; yes, clearer, clearer, oh ! so bright and glorious ! Yet it was beautiful too in spring, when the brown earth began to grow green : beautiful in summer, when the blue sky looked so much bluer, if you could hem a piece of it in between the new white carving ; beautiful in the solemn starry nights, so solemn that it almost reached agony—the awe and joy one had in their great beauty. But of all these beautiful times, I remember

the whole only of autumn-tide ; the others come in bits to me ; I can think only of parts of them, but all of autumn ; and of all days and nights in autumn, I remember one more particularly. That autumn day the church was nearly finished, and the monks, for whom we were building the church, and the people, who lived in the town hard by, crowded round us oftentimes to watch us carving.

Now the great Church, and the buildings of the Abbey where the monks lived, were about three miles from the town, and the town stood on a hill overlooking the rich autumn country ; it was girt about with great walls that had overhanging battlements, and towers at certain places all along the walls, and often we could see from the churchyard or the Abbey garden, the flash of helmets and spears, and the dim shadowy waving of banners, as the knights and lords and men-at-arms passed to and fro along the battlements ; and we could see too in the town the three spires of the three churches ; and the spire of the Cathedral, which was the tallest of the three, was gilt all over with gold, and always at night-time a great lamp shone from it that hung in the spire midway between the roof of the church and the cross at the top of the spire. The Abbey where we built the church was not girt by stone walls, but by a circle of poplar trees, and whenever a wind passed over them, were it ever so little a breath, it set them all a-ripple ; and when the wind was high, they bowed and swayed very low, and the wind, as it lifted the leaves, and showed their silvery white sides, or as again in the lulls of it, it let them drop, kept on changing the trees from green to white, and white to green ; moreover, through the boughs and trunks of the poplars, we caught glimpses of the great golden corn sea, waving, waving, waving for leagues and leagues ; and among the corn grew burning scarlet poppies, and blue corn-flowers ; and the corn-flowers were so blue, that they gleamed, and seemed to burn with a steady light, as they grew

beside the poppies among the gold of the wheat. Through the corn sea ran a blue river, and always green meadows and lines of tall poplars followed its windings. The old Church had been burned, and that was the reason why the monks caused me to build the new one ; the buildings of the Abbey were built at the same time as the burned-down Church, more than a hundred years before I was born, and they were on the north side of the Church, and joined to it by a cloister of round arches, and in the midst of the cloister was a lawn, and in the midst of that lawn, a fountain of marble, carved round about with flowers and strange beasts ; and at the edge of the lawn, near the round arches, were a great many sun-flowers that were all in blossom on that autumn day ; and up many of the pillars of the cloister crept passion-flowers and roses. Then farther from the Church, and past the cloister and its buildings, were many detached buildings, and a great garden round them, all within the circle of the poplar trees ; in the garden were trellises covered over with roses, and convolvulus, and the great-leaved fiery nasturtium ; and specially all along by the poplar trees were there trellises, but on these grew nothing but deep crimson roses ; the hollyhocks too were all out in blossom at that time, great spires of pink, and orange, and red, and white, with their soft, downy leaves. I said that nothing grew on the trellises by the poplars but crimson roses, but I was not quite right, for in many places the wild flowers had crept into the garden from without ; lush green briony, with green-white blossoms, that grows so fast, one could almost think that we see it grow, and deadly nightshade, *La bella donna*, O ! so beautiful ; red berry, and purple, yellow-spiked flower, and deadly, cruel-looking, dark green leaf, all growing together in the glorious days of early autumn. And in the midst of the great garden was a conduit, with its sides carved with histories from the Bible, and there was on it too, as on the fountain in the cloister, much carving of

flowers and strange beasts. Now the Church itself was surrounded on every side but the north by the cemetery, and there were many graves there, both of monks and of laymen, and often the friends of those, whose bodies lay there, had planted flowers about the graves of those they loved. I remember one such particularly, for at the head of it was a cross of carved wood, and at the foot of it, facing the cross, three tall sun-flowers; then in the midst of the cemetery was a cross of stone, carved on one side with the Crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ, and on the other with Our Lady holding the Divine Child. So that day, that I specially remember, in Autumn-tide, when the Church was nearly finished, I was carving in the central porch of the west front; (for I carved all those bas-reliefs in the west front with my own hand;) beneath me my sister Margaret was carving at the flower-work, and the little quatrefoils that carry the signs of the zodiac and emblems of the months: now my sister Margaret was rather more than twenty years old at that time, and she was very beautiful, with dark brown hair and deep calm violet eyes. I had lived with her all my life, lived with her almost alone latterly, for our father and mother died when she was quite young, and I loved her very much, though I was not thinking of her just then, as she stood beneath me carving. Now the central porch was carved with a bas-relief of the Last Judgment, and it was divided into three parts by horizontal bands of deep flower-work. In the lowest division, just over the doors, was carved the Rising of the Dead; above were angels blowing long trumpets, and Michael the Archangel weighing the souls, and the blessed led into heaven by angels, and the lost into hell by the devil; and in the topmost division was the Judge of the world.

All the figures in the porch were finished except one, and I remember when I woke that morning my exultation at the thought of my Church being so nearly finished; I remember, too, how a kind of misgiving mingled with

the exultation, which, try all I could, I was unable to shake off ; I thought then it was a rebuke for my pride : well, perhaps it was. The figure I had to carve was Abraham, sitting with a blossoming tree on each side of him, holding in his two hands the corners of his great robe, so that it made a mighty fold, wherein, with their hands crossed over their breasts, were the souls of the faithful, of whom he was called Father : I stood on the scaffolding for some time, while Margaret's chisel worked on bravely down below. I took mine in my hand, and stood so, listening to the noise of the masons inside, and two monks of the Abbey came and stood below me, and a knight, holding his little daughter by the hand, who every now and then looked up at him, and asked him strange questions. I did not think of these long, but began to think of Abraham, yet I could not think of him sitting there, quiet and solemn, while the Judgment-Trumpet was being blown ; I rather thought of him as he looked when he chased those kings so far ; riding far ahead of any of his company, with his mail-hood off his head, and lying in grim folds down his back, with the strong west wind blowing his wild black hair far out behind him, with the wind rippling the long scarlet pennon of his lance ; riding there amid the rocks and the sands alone ; with the last gleam of the armour of the beaten kings disappearing behind the winding of the pass ; with his company a long, long way behind, quite out of sight, though their trumpets sounded faintly among the clefts of the rocks ; and so I thought I saw him, till in his fierce chase he leapt, horse and man, into a deep river, quiet, swift, and smooth ; and there was something in the moving of the water-lilies as the breast of the horse swept them aside, that suddenly took away the thought of Abraham and brought a strange dream of lands I had never seen ; and the first was of a place where I was quite alone, standing by the side of a river, and there was the sound of singing a very long way off, but no living thing of any kind could be

seen, and the land was quite flat, quite without hills, and quite without trees too, and the river wound very much, making all kinds of quaint curves, and on the side where I stood there grew nothing but long grass, but on the other side grew, quite on to the horizon, a great sea of red corn-poppies, only paths of white lilies wound all among them, with here and there a great golden sun-flower. So I looked down at the river by my feet, and saw how blue it was, and how, as the stream went swiftly by, it swayed to and fro the long green weeds, and I stood and looked at the river for long, till at last I felt some one touch me on the shoulder, and, looking round, I saw standing by me my friend Amyot, whom I love better than any one else in the world, but I thought in my dream that I was frightened when I saw him, for his face had changed so, it was so bright and almost transparent, and his eyes gleamed and shone as I had never seen them do before. Oh ! he was so wondrously beautiful, so fearfully beautiful ! and as I looked at him the distant music swelled, and seemed to come close up to me, and then swept by us, and fainted away, at last died off entirely ; and then I felt sick at heart, and faint, and parched, and I stooped to drink of the water of the river, and as soon as the water touched my lips, lo ! the river vanished, and the flat country with its poppies and lilies, and I dreamed that I was in a boat by myself again, floating in an almost land-locked bay of the northern sea, under a cliff of dark basalt. I was lying on my back in the boat, looking up at the intensely blue sky, and a long low swell from the outer sea lifted the boat up and let it fall again and carried it gradually nearer and nearer towards the dark cliff ; and as I moved on, I saw at last, on the top of the cliff, a castle, with many towers, and on the highest tower of the castle there was a great white banner floating, with a red chevron on it, and three golden stars on the chevron ; presently I saw too on one of the towers, growing in a cranny of the worn stones, a great

bunch of golden and blood-red wall-flowers, and I watched the wall-flowers and banner for long ; when suddenly I heard a trumpet blow from the castle, and saw a rush of armed men on to the battlements, and there was a fierce fight, till at last it was ended, and one went to the banner and pulled it down, and cast it over the cliff into the sea, and it came down in long sweeps, with the wind making little ripples in it ;—slowly, slowly it came, till at last it fell over me and covered me from my feet till over my breast, and I let it stay there and looked again at the castle, and then I saw that there was an amber-coloured banner floating over the castle in place of the red chevron, and it was much larger than the other : also now, a man stood on the battlements, looking towards me ; he had a tilting helmet on, with the visor down, and an amber-coloured surcoat over his armour : his right hand was ungauntletted, and he held it high above his head, and in his hand was the bunch of wall-flowers that I had seen growing on the wall ; and his hand was white and small, like a woman's, for in my dream I could see even very far off things much clearer than we see real material things on the earth : presently he threw the wall-flowers over the cliff, and they fell in the boat just behind my head, and then I saw, looking down from the battlements of the castle, Amyot. He looked down towards me very sorrowfully, I thought, but, even as in the other dream, said nothing ; so I thought in my dream that I wept for very pity, and for love of him, for he looked as a man just risen from a long illness, and who will carry till he dies a dull pain about with him. He was very thin, and his long black hair drooped all about his face, as he leaned over the battlements looking at me : he was quite pale, and his cheeks were hollow, but his eyes large, and soft, and sad. So I reached out my arms to him, and suddenly I was walking with him in a lovely garden, and we said nothing, for the music which I had heard at first was sounding close to us now, and there

were many birds in the boughs of the trees : oh, such birds ! gold, and ruby, and emerald, but they sung not at all, but were quite silent, as though they too were listening to the music. Now all this time Amyot and I had been looking at each other, but just then I turned my head away from him, and as soon as I did so, the music ended with a long wail, and when I turned again Amyot was gone ; then I felt even more sad and sick at heart than I had before when I was by the river, and I leaned against a tree, and put my hands before my eyes. When I looked again the garden was gone, and I knew not where I was, and presently all my dreams were gone. The chips were flying bravely from the stone under my chisel at last, and all my thoughts now were in my carving, when I heard my name, "Walter," called, and when I looked down I saw one standing below me, whom I had seen in my dreams just before—Amyot. I had no hopes of seeing him for a long time, perhaps I might never see him again, I thought, for he was away (as I thought) fighting in the holy wars, and it made me almost beside myself to see him standing close by me in the flesh. I got down from my scaffolding as soon as I could, and all thoughts else were soon drowned in the joy of having him by me ; Margaret, too, how glad she must have been, for she had been betrothed to him for some time before he went to the wars, and he had been five years away ; five years ! and how we had thought of him through those many weary days ! how often his face had come before me ! his brave, honest face, the most beautiful among all the faces of men and women I have ever seen. Yes, I remember how five years ago I held his hand as we came together out of the cathedral of that great, far-off city, whose name I forget now ; and then I remember the stamping of the horses' feet ; I remember how his hand left mine at last, and then, some one looking back at me earnestly as they all rode on together—looking back, with his hand on the saddle behind him, while the trumpets sang in

long solemn peals as they all rode on together, with the glimmer of arms and the fluttering of banners, and the clinking of the rings of the mail, that sounded like the falling of many drops of water into the deep, still waters of some pool that the rocks nearly meet over; and the gleam and flash of the swords, and the glimmer of the lance-heads and the flutter of the rippled banners, that streamed out from them, swept past me, and were gone, and they seemed like a pageant in a dream, whose meaning we know not; and those sounds too, the trumpets, and the clink of the mail, and the thunder of the horse-hoofs, they seemed dream-like too—and it was all like a dream that he should leave me, for we had said that we should always be together; but he went away, and now he is come back again.

We were by his bed-side, Margaret and I; I stood and leaned over him, and my hair fell sideways over my face and touched his face; Margaret kneeled beside me, quivering in every limb, not with pain, I think, but rather shaken by a passion of earnest prayer. After some time (I know not how long), I looked up from his face to the window underneath which he lay; I do not know what time of the day it was, but I know that it was a glorious autumn day, a day soft with melting, golden haze: a vine and a rose grew together, and trailed half across the window, so that I could not see much of the beautiful blue sky, and nothing of town or country beyond; the vine leaves were touched with red here and there, and three over-blown roses, light pink roses, hung amongst them. I remember dwelling on the strange lines the autumn had made in red on one of the gold-green vine leaves, and watching one leaf of one of the over-blown roses, expecting it to fall every minute; but as I gazed, and felt disappointed that the rose leaf had not fallen yet, I felt my pain suddenly shoot through me, and I remembered what I had lost; and then came bitter, bitter dreams,—dreams which had once made me happy,—dreams of the

things I had hoped would be, of the things that would never be now ; they came between the fair vine leaves and rose blossoms, and that which lay before the window ; they came as before, perfect in colour and form, sweet sounds and shapes. But now in every one was something unutterably miserable ; they would not go away, they put out the steady glow of the golden haze, the sweet light of the sun through the vine leaves, the soft leaning of the full blown roses. I wandered in them for a long time ; at last I felt a hand put me aside gently, for I was standing at the head of—of the bed ; then some one kissed my forehead, and words were spoken—I know not what words. The bitter dreams left me for the bitterer reality at last ; for I had found him that morning lying dead, only the morning after I had seen him when he had come back from his long absence—I had found him lying dead, with his hands crossed downwards, with his eyes closed, as though the angels had done that for him ; and now when I looked at him he still lay there, and Margaret knelt by him with her face touching his : she was not quivering now, her lips moved not at all as they had done just before ; and so, suddenly those words came to my mind which she had spoken when she kissed me, and which at the time I had only heard with my outward hearing, for she had said, “ Walter, farewell, and Christ keep you ; but for me, I must be with him, for so I promised him last night that I would never leave him any more, and God will let me go.” And verily Margaret and Amyot did go, and left me very lonely and sad.

It was just beneath the westernmost arch of the nave, there I carved their tomb : I was a long time carving it ; I did not think I should be so long at first, and I said, “ I shall die when I have finished carving it,” thinking that would be a very short time. But so it happened after I had carved those two whom I loved, lying with clasped hands like husband and wife above their tomb, that I could not yet leave carving it ; and

so that I might be near them I became a monk, and used to sit in the choir and sing, thinking of the time when we should all be together again. And as I had time I used to go to the westernmost arch of the nave and work at the tomb that was there under the great, sweeping arch ; and in process of time I raised a marble canopy that reached quite up to the top of the arch, and I painted it too as fair as I could, and carved it all about with many flowers and histories, and in them I carved the faces of those I had known on earth (for I was not as one on earth now, but seemed quite away out of the world). And as I carved, sometimes the monks and other people too would come and gaze, and watch how the flowers grew ; and sometimes too as they gazed, they would weep for pity, knowing how all had been. So my life passed, and I lived in that abbey for twenty years after he died, till one morning, quite early, when they came into the church for matins, they found me lying dead, with my chisel in my hand, underneath the last lily of the tomb.

THE HOLLOW LAND

A TALE

CHAPTER I

STRUGGLING IN THE WORLD

"We find in ancient story wonders many told,
Of heroes in great glory, with spirit free and bold;
Of joyances and high-tides, of weeping and of woe,
Of noble reckon striving, mote ye now wonders know."
Niebelungen Lied (see Carlyle's Miscellanies).

Do you know where it is—the Hollow Land?

I have been looking for it now so long, trying to find it again—the Hollow Land—for there I saw my love first.

I wish to tell you how I found it first of all; but I am old, my memory fails me: you must wait and let me think if I perchance can tell you how it happened.

Yea, in my ears is a confused noise of trumpet-blasts singing over desolate moors, in my ears and eyes a clashing and clanging of horse-hoofs, a ringing and glittering of steel; drawn-back lips, set teeth, shouts, shrieks, and curses.

How was it that no one of us ever found it till that day? for it is near our country: but what time have we to look for it, or any other good thing; with such biting carking cares hemming us in on every side—cares about great things—mighty things: mighty things, O my

brothers ! or rather little things enough, if we only knew it.

Lives past in turmoil, in making one another unhappy ; in bitterest misunderstanding of our brothers' hearts, making those sad whom God has not made sad,—alas, alas ! what chance for any of us to find the Hollow Land ? what time even to look for it ?

Yet who has not dreamed of it ? Who, half miserable yet the while, for that he knows it is but a dream, has not felt the cool waves round his feet, the roses crowning him, and through the leaves of beech and lime the many whispering winds of the Hollow Land ?

Now, my name was Florian, and my house was the house of the Lilies ; and of that house was my father Lord, and after him my eldest brother Arnald : and me they called Florian de Liliis.

Moreover, when my father was dead, there arose a feud between the Lilies' house and Red Harald ; and this that follows is the history of it.

Lady Swanhilda, Red Harald's mother, was a widow, with one son, Red Harald ; and when she had been in widowhood two years, being of princely blood, and besides comely and fierce, King Urrayne sent to demand her in marriage. And I remember seeing the procession leaving the town, when I was quite a child ; and many young knights and squires attended the Lady Swanhilda as pages, and amongst them, Arnald, my eldest brother.

And as I gazed out of the window, I saw him walking by the side of her horse, dressed in white and gold very delicately ; but as he went it chanced that he stumbled. Now he was one of those that held a golden canopy over the lady's head, so that it now sunk into wrinkles, and the lady had to bow her head full low, and even then the gold brocade caught in one of the long slim gold flowers that were wrought round about the crown she wore. She flushed up in her rage, and her smooth face went suddenly into the carven wrinkles of a wooden water-spout, and she caught at the brocade with her

left hand, and pulled it away furiously, so that the warp and woof were twisted out of their places, and many gold threads were left dangling about the crown ; but Swanhilda stared about when she rose, then smote my brother across the mouth with her gilded sceptre, and the red blood flowed all about his garments ; yet he only turned exceedingly pale, and dared say no word, though he was heir to the house of the Lilies : but my small heart swelled with rage, and I vowed revenge, and, as it seems, he did too.

So when Swanhilda had been queen three years, she suborned many of King Urrayne's knights and lords, and slew her husband as he slept, and reigned in his stead. And her son, Harald, grew up to manhood, and was counted a strong knight, and well spoken of, by then I first put on my armour.

Then, one night, as I lay dreaming, I felt a hand laid on my face, and starting up saw Arnald before me fully armed. He said, " Florian, rise and arm." I did so, all but my helm, as he was.

He kissed me on the forehead ; his lips felt hot and dry ; and when they brought torches, and I could see his face plainly, I saw he was very pale. He said :

" Do you remember, Florian, this day sixteen years ago ? It is a long time, but I shall never forget it unless this night blots out its memory."

I knew what he meant, and because my heart was wicked, I rejoiced exceedingly at the thought of vengeance, so that I could not speak, but only laid my palm across his lips.

" Good ; you have a good memory, Florian. See now, I waited long and long : I said at first, I forgive her ; but when the news came concerning the death of the king, and how that she was shameless, I said I will take it as a sign, if God does not punish her within certain years, that He means me to do so ; and I have been watching and watching now these two years for an opportunity, and behold it is come at last ; and I

think God has certainly given her into our hands, for she rests this night, this very Christmas Eve, at a small walled town on the frontier, not two hours' gallop from this ; they keep little ward there, and the night is wild : moreover, the prior of a certain house of monks, just without the walls, is my fast friend in this matter, for she has done him some great injury. In the courtyard below, a hundred and fifty knights and squires, all faithful and true, are waiting for us : one moment and we shall be gone."

Then we both knelt down, and prayed God to give her into our hands : we put on our helms, and went down into the courtyard.

It was the first time I expected to use a sharp sword in anger, and I was full of joy as the muffled thunder of our horse-hoofs rolled through the bitter winter night.

In about an hour and a half we had crossed the frontier, and in half an hour more the greater part had halted in a wood near the Abbey, while I and a few others went up to the Abbey gates, and knocked loudly four times with my sword-hilt, stamping on the ground meantime. A long, low whistle answered me from within, which I in my turn answered : then the wicket opened, and a monk came out, holding a lantern. He seemed yet in the prime of life, and was a tall, powerful man. He held the lantern to my face, then smiled, and said, "The banners hang low." I gave the countersign, "The crest is lopped off." "Good my son," said he ; "the ladders are within here. I dare not trust any of the brethren to carry them for you, though they love not the witch either, but are timorsome."

"No matter," I said, "I have men here." So they entered and began to shoulder the tall ladders : the prior was very busy. "You will find them just the right length, my son, trust me for that." He seemed quite a jolly, pleasant man, I could not understand him nursing furious revenge ; but his face darkened strangely whenever he happened to mention her name.

As we were starting he came and stood outside the gate, and putting his lantern down that the light of it might not confuse his sight, looked earnestly into the night, then said : " The wind has fallen, the snow flakes get thinner and smaller every moment, in an hour it will be freezing hard, and will be quite clear ; everything depends upon the surprise being complete ; stop a few minutes yet, my son." He went away chuckling, and returned presently with two more sturdy monks carrying something : they threw their burdens down before my feet, they consisted of all the white albs in the abbey : " There, trust an old man, who has seen more than one stricken fight in his carnal days ; let the men who scale the walls put these over their arms, and they will not be seen in the least. God make your sword sharp, my son."

So we departed, and when I met Arnald again, he said that what the prior had done was well thought of ; so we agreed that I should take thirty men, an old squire of our house, well skilled in war, along with them, scale the walls as quietly as possible, and open the gates to the rest.

I set off accordingly, after that with low laughing we had put the albs all over us, wrapping the ladders also in white. Then we crept very warily and slowly up to the wall ; the moat was frozen over, and on the ice the snow lay quite thick ; we all thought that the guards must be careless enough, when they did not even take the trouble to break the ice in the moat. So we listened—there was no sound at all, the Christmas midnight mass had long ago been over, it was nearly three o'clock, and the moon began to clear ; there was scarce any snow falling now, only a flake or two from some low hurrying cloud or other : the wind sighed gently about the round towers there, but it was bitter cold, for it had begun to freeze again : we listened for some minutes, about a quarter of an hour I think, then at a sign from me they raised the ladders carefully,

muffled as they were at the top with swathings of wool. I mounted first, old Squire Hugh followed last ; noiselessly we ascended, and soon stood all together on the walls ; then we carefully lowered the ladders again with long ropes ; we got our swords and axes from out of the folds of our priests' raiments, and set forward, till we reached the first tower along the wall ; the door was open, in the chamber at the top there was a fire slowly smouldering, nothing else ; we passed through it, and began to go down the spiral staircase, I first, with my axe shortened in my hand.—“What if we were surprised there,” I thought, and I longed to be out in the air again ; “what if the door were fast at the bottom.”

As we passed the second chamber, we heard some one within snoring loudly : I looked in quietly, and saw a big man with long black hair, that fell off his pillow and swept the ground, lying snoring, with his nose turned up and his mouth open, but he seemed so sound asleep that we did not stop to slay him.—Praise be !—the door was open : without even a whispered word, without a pause, we went on along the streets, on the side that the drift had been on, because our garments were white, for the wind being very strong all that day, the houses on that side had caught in their cornices and carvings, and on the rough stone and wood of them, so much snow, that except here and there where the black walls grinned out, they were quite white ; no man saw us as we stole along, noiselessly because of the snow, till we stood within 100 yards of the gates and their house of guard. And we stood because we heard the voice of some one singing :

“Queen Mary's crown was gold,
King Joseph's crown was red,
But Jesus' crown was diamond
That lit up all the bed
Mariæ Virginis.”

So they had some guards after all ; this was clearly the

sentinel that sung to keep the ghosts off.—Now for a fight.—We drew nearer, a few yards nearer, then stopped to free ourselves from our monks' clothes.

“Ships sail through the Heaven
With red banners dressed,
Carrying the planets seven
To see the white breast
 Mariæ Virginis.”

Thereat he must have seen the waving of some alb or other as it shivered down to the ground, for his spear fell with a thud, and he seemed to be standing open-mouthed, thinking something about ghosts; then, plucking up heart of grace, he roared out like ten bull-calves, and dashed into the guard-house.

We followed smartly, but without hurry, and came up to the door of it just as some dozen half-armed men came tumbling out under our axes: thereupon, while our men slew them, I blew a great blast upon my horn, and Hugh with some others drew bolt and bar and swung the gates wide open.

Then the men in the guard-house understood they were taken in a trap, and began to stir with great confusion; so lest they should get quite waked and armed, I left Hugh at the gates with ten men, and myself led the rest into that house. There while we slew all those that yielded not, came Arnald with the others, bringing our horses with them: then all the enemy threw their arms down. And we counted our prisoners and found them over fourscore; therefore, not knowing what to do with them (for they were too many to guard, and it seemed unknightly to slay them all), we sent up some bowmen to the walls, and turning our prisoners out of gates, bid them run for their lives, which they did fast enough, not knowing our numbers, and our men sent a few flights of arrows among them that they might not be undeceived.

Then the one or two prisoners that we had left,

told us, when we had crossed our axes over their heads, that the people of the good town would not willingly fight us, in that they hated the queen ; that she was guarded at the palace by some fifty knights, and that beside, there were no others to oppose us in the town : so we set out for the palace, spear in hand.

We had not gone far, before we heard some knights coming, and soon, in a turn of the long street, we saw them riding towards us ; when they caught sight of us they seemed astonished, drew rein, and stood in some confusion.

We did not slacken our pace for an instant, but rode right at them with a yell, to which I lent myself with all my heart.

After all they did not run away, but waited for us with their spears held out ; I missed the man I had marked, or hit him rather just on the top of the helm ; he bent back, and the spear slipped over his head, but my horse still kept on, and I felt presently such a crash that I reeled in my saddle, and felt mad. He had lashed out at me with his sword as I came on, hitting me in the ribs (for my arm was raised), but only flatlings.

I was quite wild with rage, I turned, almost fell upon him, caught him by the neck with both hands, and threw him under the horse-hoofs, sighing with fury : I heard Arnald's voice close to me, " Well fought, Florian ; " and I saw his great stern face bare among the iron, for he had made a vow in remembrance of that blow always to fight unhelmed ; I saw his great sword swinging, in wide gyres, and hissing as it started up, just as if it were alive and liked it.

So joy filled all my soul, and I fought with my heart, till the big axe I swung felt like nothing but a little hammer in my hand, except for its bitterness : and as for the enemy, they went down like grass, so that we destroyed them utterly, for those knights would neither yield nor fly, but died as they stood, so that some fifteen of our men also died there.

Then at last we came to the palace, where some grooms and such like kept the gates armed, but some ran, and some we took prisoners, one of whom died for sheer terror in our hands, being stricken by no wound : for he thought we would eat him.

These prisoners we questioned concerning the queen, and so entered the great hall.

There Arnald sat down in the throne on the dais, and laid his naked sword before him on the table : and on each side of him sat such knights as there was room for, and the others stood round about, while I took ten men, and went to look for Swanhilda.

I found her soon, sitting by herself in a gorgeous chamber. I almost pitied her when I saw her looking so utterly desolate and despairing ; her beauty too had faded, deep lines cut through her face. But when I entered she knew who I was, and her look of intense hatred was so fiend-like, that it changed my pity into horror of her.

" Knight," she said, " who are you, and what do you want, thus discourteously entering my chamber ? "

" I am Florian de Liliis, and I am to conduct you to judgment."

She sprung up, " Curse you and your whole house,—you I hate worse than any,—girl's face,—guards ! guards ! " and she stamped on the ground, her veins on the forehead swelled, her eyes grew round and flamed out, as she kept crying for her guards, stamping the while, for she seemed quite mad.

Then at last she remembered that she was in the power of her enemies, she sat down, and lay with her face between her hands, and wept passionately.

" Witch," I said between my closed teeth, " will you come, or must we carry you down to the great hall ? "

Neither would she come, but sat there, clutching at her dress and tearing her hair.

Then I said, " Bind her, and carry her down." And they did so.

I watched Arnald as we came in, there was no triumph in his stern white face, but resolution enough, he had made up his mind.

They placed her on a seat in the midst of the hall over against the dais. He said, "Unbind her, Florian." They did so, she raised her face, and glared defiance at us all, as though she would die queenly after all.

Then rose up Arnald and said, "Queen Swanhilda, we judge you guilty of death, and because you are a queen and of a noble house, you shall be slain by my knightly sword, and I will even take the reproach of slaying a woman, for no other hand than mine shall deal the blow."

Then she said, "O false knight, show your warrant from God, man, or devil."

"This warrant from God, Swanhilda," he said, holding up his sword, "listen!—fifteen years ago, when I was just winning my spurs, you struck me, disgracing me before all the people; you cursed me, and meant that curse well enough. Men of the house of the Lilies, what sentence for that?"

"Death!" they said.

"Listen!—afterwards you slew my cousin, your husband, treacherously, in the most cursed way, stabbing him in the throat, as the stars in the canopy above him looked down on the shut eyes of him. Men of the house of the Lily, what sentence for that?"

"Death!" they said.

"Do you hear them, queen? there is warrant from man; for the devil, I do not reverence him enough to take warrant from him, but, as I look at that face of yours, I think that even he has left you."

And indeed just then all her pride seemed to leave her, she fell from the chair, and wallowed on the ground moaning, she wept like a child, so that the tears lay on the oak floor; she prayed for another month of life; she came to me and kneeled, and kissed my feet, and prayed piteously, so that water ran out of her mouth.

But I shuddered, and drew away ; it was like having an adder about one ; I could have pitied her had she died bravely, but for one like her to whine and whine !—pah !—

Then from the dais rang Arnald's voice terrible, much changed. " Let there be an end of all this." And he took his sword and strode through the hall towards her ; she rose from the ground and stood up, stooping a little, her head sunk between her shoulders, her black eyes turned up and gleaming, like a tigress about to spring. When he came within some six paces of her something in his eye daunted her, or perhaps the flashing of his terrible sword in the torch-light ; she threw her arms up with a great shriek, and dashed screaming about the hall. Arnald's lip never once curled with any scorn, no line in his face changed : he said, " Bring her here and bind her."

But when one came up to her to lay hold on her she first of all ran at him, hitting with her head in the belly. Then while he stood doubled up for want of breath, and staring with his head up, she caught his sword from the girdle, and cut him across the shoulders, and many others she wounded sorely before they took her.

Then Arnald stood by the chair to which she was bound, and poised his sword, and there was a great silence.

Then he said, " Men of the House of the Lilies, do you justify me in this, shall she die ? " Straightway rang a great shout through the hall, but before it died away the sword had swept round, and therewithal was there no such thing as Swanhilda left upon the earth, for in no battle-field had Arnald struck truer blow. Then he turned to the few servants of the palace and said, " Go now, bury this accursed woman, for she is a king's daughter." Then to us all, " Now knights, to horse and away, that we may reach the good town by about dawn." So we mounted and rode off.

What a strange Christmas day that was, for there,

about nine o'clock in the morning, rode Red Harald into the good town to demand vengeance ; he went at once to the king, and the king promised that before nightfall that very day the matter should be judged ; albeit the king feared somewhat, because every third man you met in the streets had a blue cross on his shoulder, and some likeness of a lily, cut out or painted, stuck in his hat ; and this blue cross and lily were the bearings of our house, called " De Liliis." Now we had seen Red Harald pass through the streets, with a white banner borne before him, to show that he came peaceably as for this time ; but I trow he was thinking of other things but peace.

And he was called Red Harald first at this time, because over all his arms he wore a great scarlet cloth, that fell in heavy folds about his horse and all about him. Then, as he passed our house, some one pointed it out to him, rising there with its carving and its barred marble, but stronger than many a castle on the hill-tops, and its great overhanging battlement cast a mighty shadow down the wall and across the street ; and above all rose the great tower, our banner floating proudly from the top, whereon was emblazoned on a white ground a blue cross, and on a blue ground four white lilies. And now faces were gazing from all the windows, and all the battlements were thronged ; so Harald turned, and rising in his stirrups, shook his clenched fist at our house ; natheless, as he did so, the east wind, coming down the street, caught up the corner of that scarlet cloth and drove it over his face, and therewithal disordering his long black hair, well nigh choked him, so that he bit both his hair and that cloth.

So from base to cope rose a mighty shout of triumph and defiance, and he passed on.

Then Arnald caused it to be cried, that all those who loved the good House of the Lilies should go to mass that morning in St. Mary's Church, hard by our

house. Now this church belonged to us, and the abbey that served it, and always we appointed the abbot of it on condition that our trumpets should sound all together when on high masses they sing the "Gloria in Excelsis." It was the largest and most beautiful of all the churches in the town, and had two exceeding high towers, which you could see from far off, even when you saw not the town or any of its other towers: and in one of these towers were twelve great bells, named after the twelve Apostles, one name being written on each one of them; as Peter, Matthew, and so on; and in the other tower was one great bell only, much larger than any of the others, and which was called Mary. Now this bell was never rung but when our house was in great danger, and it had this legend on it, "When Mary rings the earth shakes;" and indeed from this we took our war cry, which was, "Mary rings;" somewhat justifiably indeed, for the last time that Mary rung, on that day before nightfall there were four thousand bodies to be buried, which bodies wore neither cross nor lily.

So Arnald gave me in charge to tell the abbot to cause Mary to be tolled for an hour before mass that day.

The abbot leaned on my shoulder as I stood within the tower and looked at the twelve monks laying their hands to the ropes. Far up in the dimness I saw the wheel before it began to swing round about; then it moved a little; the twelve men bent down to the earth and a roar rose that shook the tower from base to spire-vane: backwards and forwards swept the wheel, as Mary now looked downwards towards earth, now looked up at the shadowy cone of the spire, shot across by bars of light from the dormers.

And the thunder of Mary was caught up by the wind and carried through all the country; and when the good man heard it, he said good-bye to wife and child, slung his shield behind his back, and set forward with his spear sloped over his shoulder, and many a time,

as he walked toward the good town, he tightened the belt that went about his waist, that he might stride the faster, so long and furiously did Mary toll.

And before the great bell, Mary, had ceased ringing, all the ways were full of armed men.

But at each door of the church of St. Mary stood a row of men armed with axes, and when any came, meaning to go into the church, the two first of these would hold their axes (whose helms were about four feet long) over his head, and would ask him, "Who went over the moon last night?" then if he answered nothing or at random they would bid him turn back, which he for the more part would be ready enough to do; but some, striving to get through that row of men, were slain outright; but if he were one of those that were friends to the House of the Lilies he would answer to that question, "Mary and John."

By the time the mass began the whole church was full, and in the nave and transept thereof were three thousand men, all of our house and all armed. But Arnald and myself, and Squire Hugh, and some others sat under a gold-fringed canopy near the choir; and the abbot said mass, having his mitre on his head. Yet, as I watched him, it seemed to me that he must have something on beneath his priest's vestments, for he looked much fatter than usual, being really a tall lithe man.

Now, as they sung the "Kyrie," some one shouted from the other end of the church, "My lord Arnald, they are slaying our people without;" for, indeed, all the square about the church was full of our people, who for the press had not been able to enter, and were standing there in no small dread of what might come to pass.

Then the abbot turned round from the altar, and began to fidget with the fastenings of his rich robes.

And they made a lane for us up to the west door; then I put on my helm and we began to go up the

nave, then suddenly the singing of the monks and all stopped. I heard a clinking and a buzz of voices in the choir; I turned, and saw that the bright noon sun was shining on the gold of the priest's vestments, as they lay on the floor, and on the mail that the priests carried.

So we stopped, the choir gates swung open, and the abbot marched out at the head of *his* men, all fully armed, and began to strike up the psalm "Exsurgat Deus."

When we got to the west door, there was indeed a tumult, but as yet no slaying; the square was all a-flicker with steel, and we beheld a great body of knights, at the head of them Red Harald and the king, standing over against us; but our people, pressed against the houses, and into the corners of the square, were, some striving to enter the doors, some beside themselves with rage, shouting out to the others to charge; withal, some were pale and some were red with the blood that had gathered to the wrathful faces of them.

Then said Arnald to those about him, "Lift me up." So they laid a great shield on two lances, and these four men carried, and thereon stood Arnald, and gazed about him.

Now the king was unhelmed, and his white hair (for he was an old man) flowed down behind him on to his saddle; but Arnald's hair was cut short, and was red.

And all the bells rang.

Then the king said, "O Arnald of the Lilies, will you settle this quarrel by the judgment of God?" And Arnald thrust up his chin, and said, "Yea." "How then," said the king, "and where?" "Will it please you try now?" said Arnald.

Then the king understood what he meant, and took in his hand from behind tresses of his long white hair, twisting them round his hand in his wrath, but yet said no word, till I suppose his hair put him in mind of

something, and he raised it in both his hands above his head, and shouted out aloud, "O knights, hearken to this traitor." Whereat, indeed, the lances began to move ominously. But Arnald spoke.

"O you king and lords, what have we to do with you? were we not free in the old time, up among the hills there? Wherefore give way, and we will go to the hills again; and if any man try to stop us, his blood be on his own head; wherefore now," (and he turned) "all you House of the Lily, both soldiers and monks, let us go forth together fearing nothing, for I think there is not bone enough or muscle enough in these fellows here that have a king that they should stop us withal, but only skin and fat."

And truly, no man dared to stop us, and we went.

CHAPTER II

FAILING IN THE WORLD

Now at that time we drove cattle in Red Harald's land.

And we took no hoof but from the Lords and rich men, but of these we had a mighty drove, both oxen and sheep, and horses, and besides, even hawks and hounds, and a huntsman or two to take care of them.

And, about noon, we drew away from the corn-lands that lay beyond the pastures, and mingled with them, and reached a wide moor, which was called "Goliah's Land." I scarce know why, except that it belonged neither to Red Harald or us, but was debatable.

And the cattle began to go slowly, and our horses were tired, and the sun struck down very hot upon us, for there was no shadow, and the day was cloudless.

All about the edge of the moor, except on the side from which we had come, was a rim of hills, not very high, but very rocky and steep, otherwise the moor

itself was flat ; and through these hills was one pass, guarded by our men, which pass led to the Hill castle of the Lilies.

It was not wonderful, that of this moor many wild stories were told, being such a strange lonely place, some of them one knew, alas ! to be over true. In the old time, before we went to the good town, this moor had been the mustering place of our people, and our house had done deeds enough of blood and horror to turn our white lilies red, and our blue cross to a fiery one. But some of those wild tales I never believed ; they had to do mostly with men losing their way without any apparent cause, (for there were plenty of landmarks,) finding some well-known spot, and then, just beyond it, a place they had never even dreamed of.

"Florian ! Florian !" said Arnald, "for God's sake stop ! as every one else is stopping to look at the hills yonder ; I always thought there was a curse upon us. What does God mean by shutting us up here ? Look at the cattle ; O Christ, they have found it out too ! See, some of them are turning to run back again towards Harald's land. Oh ! unhappy, unhappy, from that day forward !"

He leaned forward, rested his head on his horse's neck, and wept like a child.

I felt so irritated with him, that I could almost have slain him then and there. Was he mad ? had these wild doings of ours turned his strong wise head ?

"Are you my brother Arnald, that I used to think such a grand man when I was a boy ?" I said, "or are you changed too, like everybody, and everything else ? What do *you* mean ?"

"Look ! look !" he said, grinding his teeth in agony.

I raised my eyes : where was the one pass between the rim of stern rocks ? Nothing : the enemy behind us—that grim wall in front : what wonder that each man looked in his fellow's face for help, and found it not. Yet I refused to believe that there was any

truth either in the wild stories that I had heard when I was a boy, or in this story told me so clearly by my eyes now.

I called out cheerily, "Hugh, come here!" He came. "What do you think of this? Some mere dodge on Harald's part? Are we cut off?"

"Think! Sir Florian? God forgive me for ever thinking at all; I have given up that long and long ago, because thirty years ago I thought this, that the House of Lilies would deserve anything in the way of bad fortune that God would send them: so I gave up thinking, and took to fighting. But if you think that Harald had anything to do with this, why—why—in God's name, I wish I could think so!"

I felt a dull weight on my heart. Had our house been the devil's servants all along? I thought we were God's servants.

The day was very still, but what little wind there was, was at our backs. I watched Hugh's face, not being able to answer him. He was the cleverest man at war that I have known, either before or since that day: sharper than any hound in ear and scent, clearer-sighted than any eagle; he was listening now intently. I saw a slight smile cross his face; heard him mutter, "Yes! I think so: verily that is better, a great deal better." Then he stood up in his stirrups, and shouted, "Hurrah for the Lilies! Mary rings!" "Mary rings!" I shouted, though I did not know the reason for his exultation: my brother lifted his head, and smiled too, grimly. Then as I listened I heard clearly the sound of a trumpet, and enemy's trumpet too.

"After all, it was only mist, or some such thing," I said, for the pass between the hills was clear enough now.

"Hurrah! only mist," said Arnald, quite elated; "Mary rings!" and we all began to think of fighting: for after all what joy is equal to that?

There were five hundred of us; two hundred spears,

the rest archers ; and both archers and men at arms were picked men.

"How many of them are we to expect ? " said I.

"Not under a thousand, certainly, probably more, Sir Florian." (My brother Arnald, by the way, had knighted me before we left the good town, and Hugh liked to give me the handle to my name. How was it, by the way, that no one had ever made *him* a knight ?)

"Let every one look to his arms and horse, and come away from these silly cows' sons ! " shouted Arnald.

Hugh said, "They will be here in an hour, fair Sir."

So we got clear of the cattle, and dismounted, and both ourselves took food and drink, and our horses ; afterwards we tightened our saddle-girths, shook our great pots of helmets on, except Arnald, whose rusty-red hair had been his only head-piece in battle for years and years, and stood with our spears close by our horses, leaving room for the archers to retreat between our ranks ; and they got their arrows ready, and planted their stakes before a little peat moss : and there we waited, and saw their pennons at last floating high above the corn of the fertile land, then heard their many horse-hoofs ring upon the hard-parched moor, and the archers began to shoot.

It had been a strange battle ; we had never fought better, and yet withal it had ended in a retreat ; indeed all along every man but Arnald and myself, even Hugh, had been trying at least to get the enemy between him and the way toward the pass ; and now we were all drifting that way, the enemy trying to cut us off, but never able to stop us, because he could only throw small bodies of men in our way, whom we scattered and put to flight in their turn.

I never cared less for my life than then ; indeed, in spite of all my boasting and hardness of belief, I should have been happy to have died, such a strange weight of apprehension was on me ; and yet I got no scratch

even. I had soon put off my great helm, and was fighting in my mail-coif only : and here I swear that three knights together charged me, aiming at my bare face, yet never touched me ; for, as for one, I put his lance aside with my sword, and the other two in some most wonderful manner got their spears locked in each other's armour, and so had to submit to be knocked off their horses.

And we still neared the pass, and began to see distinctly the ferns that grew on the rocks, and the fair country between the rift in them, spreading out there, blue-shadowed.

Whereupon came a great rush of men of both sides, striking side blows at each other, spitting, cursing, and shrieking, as they tore away like a herd of wild hogs. So, being careless of life, as I said, I drew rein, and turning my horse, waited quietly for them ; and I knotted the reins, and laid them on the horse's neck, and stroked him, that he whinnied ; then got both my hands to my sword.

Then, as they came on, I noted hurriedly that the first man was one of Arnald's men, and one of our men behind him leaned forward to prod him with his spear, but could not reach so far, till he himself was run through the eye with a spear, and throwing his arms up fell dead with a shriek. Also I noted concerning this first man that the laces of his helmet were loose, and when he saw me he lifted his *left* hand to his head, took off his helmet and cast it at me, and still tore on ; the helmet flew over my head, and I sitting still there, swung out, hitting him on the neck ; his head flew right off, for the mail no more held than a piece of silk.

" Mary rings," and my horse whinnied again, and we both of us went at it, and fairly stopped that rout, so that there was a knot of quite close and desperate fighting, wherein we had the best of that fight and slew most of them, albeit my horse was slain and my

mail-coif cut through. Then I bade a squire fetch me another horse, and began meanwhile to upbraid those knights for running in such a strange disorderly race, instead of standing and fighting cleverly.

Moreover we had drifted even in this successful fight still nearer to the pass, so that the conies who dwelt there were beginning to consider whether they should not run into their holes.

But one of those knights said : " Be not angry with me, Sir Florian, but do you think you will go to Heaven ? "

" The saints ! I hope so," I said, but one who stood near him whispered to him to hold his peace, so I cried out :

" O friend ! I hold this world and all therein so cheap now, that I see not anything in it but shame which can any longer anger me ; wherefore speak out."

" Then, Sir Florian, men say that at your christening some fiend took on him the likeness of a priest and strove to baptize you in the Devil's name, but God had mercy on you so that the fiend could not choose but baptize you in the name of the most holy Trinity : and yet men say that you hardly believe any doctrine such as other men do, and will at the end only go to Heaven round about as it were, not at all by the intercession of our Lady ; they say too that you can see no ghosts or other wonders, whatever happens to other Christian men."

I smiled.—" Well, friend, I scarcely call this a disadvantage, moreover what has it to do with the matter in hand ? "

How was this in Heaven's name ? we had been quite still, resting, while this talk was going on, but we could hear the hawks chattering from the rocks, we were so close now.

And my heart sunk within me, there was no reason why this should not be true ; there was no reason why anything should not be true.

"This, Sir Florian," said the knight again, "how would you feel inclined to fight if you thought that everything about you was mere glamour; this earth here, the rocks, the sun, the sky? I do not know where I am for certain, I do not know that it is not midnight instead of undern: I do not know if I have been fighting men or only *simulacra*—but I think, we all think, that we have been led into some devil's trap or other, and—and—may God forgive me my sins!—I wish I had never been born."

There now! he was weeping—they all wept—how strange it was to see those rough, bearded men blubbering there, and snivelling till the tears ran over their armour and mingled with the blood, so that it dropped down to the earth in a dim, dull, red rain.

My eyes indeed were dry, but then so was my heart; I felt far worse than weeping came to, but nevertheless I spoke cheerily.

"Dear friends, where are your old men's hearts gone to now? See now! this is a punishment for our sins, is it? well, for our forefathers' sins or our own? if the first, O brothers, be very sure that if we bear it manfully God will have something very good in store for us hereafter; but if for our sins, is it not certain that He cares for us yet, for note that He suffers the wicked to go their own ways pretty much; moreover brave men, brothers, ought to be the masters of *simulacra*—come, is it so hard to die once for all?"

Still no answer came from them, they sighed heavily only. I heard the sound of more than one or two swords as they rattled back to their scabbards: nay, one knight, stripping himself of surcoat and hauberk, and drawing his dagger, looked at me with a grim smile, and said, "Sir Florian, do so!" then he drew the dagger across his throat and he fell back dead.

They shuddered, those brave men, and crossed themselves. And I had no heart to say a word more, but mounted the horse which had been brought to me

and rode away slowly for a few yards ; then I became aware that there was a great silence over the whole field.

So I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold no man struck at another.

Then from out of a band of horsemen came Harald, and he was covered all over with a great scarlet cloth as before, put on over the head, and flowing all about his horse, but rent with the fight. He put off his helm and drew back his mail-coif, then took a trumpet from the hand of a herald and blew strongly.

And in the midst of his blast I heard a voice call out : " O Florian ! come and speak to me for the last time ! "

So when I turned I beheld Arnald standing by himself, but near him stood Hugh and ten others with drawn swords.

Then I wept, and so went to him weeping ; and he said, " Thou seest, brother, that we must die, and I think by some horrible and unheard-of death, and the House of the Lilies is just dying too ; and now I repent me of Swanhilda's death ; now I know that it was a poor cowardly piece of revenge, instead of a brave act of justice ; thus has God shown us the right.

" O Florian ! curse me ! So will it be straighter ; truly thy mother when she bore thee did not think of this ; rather saw thee in the tourney at this time, in her fond hopes, glittering with gold and doing knightly ; or else mingling thy brown locks with the golden hair of some maiden weeping for the love of thee. God forgive me ! God forgive me ! "

" What harm, brother ? " I said, " this is only failing in the world ; what if we had not failed, in a little while it would have made no difference ; truly just now I felt very miserable, but now it has passed away, and I am happy."

" O brave heart ! " he said, " yet we shall part just now, Florian, farewell."

"The road is long," I said, "farewell."

Then we kissed each other, and Hugh and the others wept.

Now all this time the trumpets had been ringing, ringing, great doleful peals, then they ceased, and above all sounded Red Harald's voice.

(So I looked round towards that pass, and when I looked I no longer doubted any of those wild tales of glamour concerning Goliah's Land; for though the rocks were the same, and though the conies still stood gazing at the doors of their dwellings, though the hawks still cried out shrilly, though the fern still shook in the wind, yet beyond, oh such a land! not to be described by any because of its great beauty, lying, a great *hollow* land, the rocks going down on this side in precipices, then reaches and reaches of loveliest country, trees and flowers, and corn, then the hills, green and blue, and purple, till their ledges reached the white snowy mountains at last. Then with all manner of strange feelings, "my heart in the midst of my body was even like melting wax.")

"O you House of the Lily! you are conquered—yet I will take vengeance only on a few, therefore let all those who wish to live come and pile their swords, and shields, and helms behind me in three great heaps, and swear fealty afterwards to me; yes, all but the false knights Arnald and Florian."

We were holding each other's hands and gazing, and we saw all our knights, yea, all but Squire Hugh and his ten heroes, pass over the field singly, or in groups of three or four, with their heads hanging down in shame, and they cast down their notched swords and dented, liliated shields, and brave-crested helms into three great heaps, behind Red Harald, then stood behind, no man speaking to his fellow, or touching him.

Then dolefully the great trumpets sang over the dying House of the Lily, and Red Harald led his men forward, but slowly: on they came, spear and mail glittering in

the sunlight ; and I turned and looked at that good land, and a shuddering delight seized my soul.

But I felt my brother's hand leave mine, and saw him turn his horse's head and ride swiftly toward the pass ; that was a strange pass now.

And at the edge he stopped, turned round and called out aloud, " I pray thee, Harald, forgive me ! now farewell all ! "

Then the horse gave one bound forward, and we heard the poor creature's scream when he felt that he must die, and we heard afterwards (for we were near enough for that even) a clang and a crash.

So I turned me about to Hugh, and he understood me though I could not speak.

We shouted all together, " Mary rings," then laid our bridles on the necks of our horses, spurred forward, and in five minutes they were all slain, and I was down among the horse-hoofs.

Not slain though, not wounded. Red Harald smiled grimly when he saw me rise and lash out again ; he and some ten others dismounted, and holding their long spears out, I went back—back, back,—I saw what it meant, and sheathed my sword, and their laughter rolled all about me, and I too smiled.

Presently they all stopped, and I felt the last foot of turf giving under my feet ; I looked down and saw the crack there widening ; then in a moment I fell, and a cloud of dust and earth rolled after me ; then again their mirth rose into thunder-peals of laughter. But through it all I heard Red Harald shout, " Silence ! evil dogs ! "

For as I fell I stretched out my arms, and caught a tuft of yellow broom some three feet from the brow, and hung there by the hands, my feet being loose in the air.

Then Red Harald came and stood on the precipice above me, his great axe over his shoulder ; and he looked down on me not ferociously, almost kindly, while

the wind from the Hollow Land blew about his red raiment, tattered and dusty now.

And I felt happy, though it pained me to hold straining by the broom, yet I said, "I will hold out to the last."

It was not long, the plant itself gave way and I fell, and as I fell I fainted.

CHAPTER III

LEAVING THE WORLD.—FYTTE THE FIRST

I HAD thought when I fell that I should never wake again ; but I woke at last : for a long time I was quite dizzyed and could see nothing at all : horrible doubts came creeping over me ; I half expected to see presently great half-formed shapes come rolling up to me to crush me ; some thing fiery, not strange, too utterly horrible to be strange, but utterly vile and ugly, the sight of which would have killed me when I was upon the earth, come rolling up to torment me. In fact I doubted if I were in hell.

I knew I deserved to be, but I prayed, and then it came into my mind that I could not pray if I were in hell.

Also there seemed to be a cool green light all about me, which was sweet.

Then presently I heard a glorious voice ring out clear, close to me—

"Christ keep the Hollow Land
Through the sweet spring-tide,
When the apple-blossoms bless
The lowly bent hillside."

Thereat my eyes were slowly unsealed, and I saw the blessedest sight I have ever seen before or since : for I saw my Love.

She sat about five yards from me on a great grey stone that had much moss on it, one of the many scattered along the side of the stream by which I lay ; she was clad in loose white raiment close to her hands and throat ; her feet were bare, her hair hung loose a long way down, but some of it lay on her knees : I said " white " raiment, but long spikes of light scarlet went down from the throat, lost here and there in the shadows of the folds, and growing smaller and smaller, died before they reached her feet.

I was lying with my head resting on soft moss that some one had gathered and placed under me. She, when she saw me moving and awake, came and stood over me with a gracious smile.—She was so lovely and tender to look at, and so kind, yet withal no one, man or woman, had ever frightened me half so much.

She was not fair in white and red, like many beautiful women are, being rather pale, but like ivory for smoothness, and her hair was quite golden, not light yellow, but dusky golden.

I tried to get up on my feet, but was too weak, and sunk back again. She said :

" No, not just yet, do not trouble yourself or try to remember anything just at present."

There withal she kneeled down, and hung over me closer.

" To-morrow you may, perhaps, have something hard to do or bear, I know, but now you must be as happy as you can be, quietly happy. Why did you start and turn pale when I came to you ? Do you not know who I am ? Nay, but you do, I see ; and I have been waiting here so long for you ; so you must have expected to see me.—You cannot be frightened of me, are you ? "

But I could not answer a word, but all the time strange knowledge, strange feelings were filling my brain and my heart ; she said :

" You are tired ; rest, and dream happily."

So she sat by me, and sung to lull me to sleep, while

I turned on my elbow, and watched the waving of her throat : and the singing of all the poets I had ever heard, and of many others too, not born till years long after I was dead, floated all about me as she sung, and I did indeed dream happily.

When I awoke it was the time of the cold dawn, and the colours were gathering themselves together, whereat in fatherly approving fashion the sun sent all across the east long bars of scarlet and orange that after faded through yellow to green and blue.

And she sat by me still ; I think she had been sitting there and singing all the time ; all through hot yesterday, for I had been sleeping day-long and night-long, all through the falling evening under moonlight and starlight the night through.

And now it was dawn, and I think too that neither of us had moved at all ; for the last thing I remembered before I went to sleep was the tips of her fingers brushing my cheek, as she knelt over me with down-drooping arm, and still now I felt them there. Moreover she was just finishing some fainting measure that died before it had time to get painful in its passion.

Dear Lord ! how I loved her ! yet did I not dare to touch her, or even speak to her. She smiled with delight when she saw I was awake again, and slid down her hand on to mine, but some shuddering dread made me draw it away again hurriedly ; then I saw the smile leave her face : what would I not have given for courage to hold her body quite tight to mine ? but I was so weak. She said :

“ Have you been very happy ? ”

“ Yea,” I said.

It was the first word I had spoken there, and my voice sounded strange.

“ Ah ! ” she said, “ you will talk more when you get used to the air of the Hollow Land. Have you been thinking of your past life at all ? If not, try to think of it. What thing in Heaven or Earth do you wish for most ? ”

Still I said no word ; but she said in a wearied way :

" Well now, I think you will be strong enough to get to your feet and walk ; take my hand and try."

Therewith she held it out : I strove hard to be brave enough to take it, but could not ; I only turned away shuddering, sick, and grieved to the heart's core of me ; then struggling hard with hand and knee and elbow, I scarce rose, and stood up totteringly ; while she watched me sadly, still holding out her hand.

But as I rose, in my swinging to and fro the steel sheath of my sword struck her on the hand so that the blood flowed from it, which she stood looking at for a while, then dropped it downwards, and turned to look at me, for I was going.

Then as I walked she followed me, so I stopped and turned and said almost fiercely :

" I am going alone to look for my brother."

The vehemence with which I spoke, or something else, burst some blood-vessel within my throat, and we both stood there with the blood running from us on to the grass and summer flowers.

She said : " If you find him, wait with him till I come."

" Yea," and I turned and left her, following the course of the stream upwards, and as I went I heard her low singing that almost broke my heart for its sadness.

And I went painfully because of my weakness, and because also of the great stones ; and sometimes I went along a spot of earth where the river had been used to flow in flood-time, and which was now bare of everything but stones ; and the sun, now risen high, poured down on everything a great flood of fierce light and scorching heat, and burnt me sorely, so that I almost fainted.

But about noontide I entered a wood close by the stream, a beech-wood, intending to rest myself ; the herbage was thin and scattered there, sprouting up from amid the leaf-sheaths and nuts of the beeches,

which had fallen year after year on that same spot ; the outside boughs swept low down, the air itself seemed green when you entered within the shadow of the branches, they over-roofed the place so with tender green, only here and there showing spots of blue.

But what lay at the foot of a great beech tree but some dead knight in armour, only the helmet off ? A wolf was prowling round about it, who ran away snarling when he saw me coming.

So I went up to that dead knight, and fell on my knees before him, laying my head on his breast, for it was Arnald.

He was quite cold, but had not been dead for very long ; I would not believe him dead, but went down to the stream and brought him water, tried to make him drink—what would you ? He was as dead as Swanhilda : neither came there any answer to my cries that afternoon but the moaning of the wood-doves in the beeches.

So then I sat down and took his head on my knees, and closed the eyes, and wept quietly while the sun sunk lower.

But a little after sunset I heard a rustle through the leaves, that was not the wind, and looking up my eyes met the pitying eyes of that maiden.

Something stirred rebelliously within me ; I ceased weeping, and said :

“ It is unjust, unfair : What right had Swanhilda to live ? did not God give her up to us ? How much better was he than ten Swanhildas ? and look you—See ! —he is DEAD.”

Now this I shrieked out, being mad ; and though I trembled when I saw some stormy wrath that vexed her very heart and loving lips, gathering on her face, I yet sat there looking at her and screaming, screaming, till all the place rang.

But when growing hoarse and breathless I ceased ; she said, with straightened brow and scornful mouth :

"So! bravely done! must I then, though I am a woman, call you a liar, for saying God is unjust? You to punish her, had not God then punished her already? How many times when she woke in the dead night do you suppose she missed seeing King Urrayne's pale face and hacked head lying on the pillow by her side? Whether by night or day, what things but screams did she hear when the wind blew loud round about the Palace corners? And did not that face too, often come before her, pale and bleeding as it was long ago, and gaze at her from unhappy eyes! poor eyes! with changed purpose in them—no more hope of converting the world when that blow was once struck, truly it was very wicked—no more dreams, but only fierce struggles with the Devil for very life, no more dreams but failure at last, and death, happier so in the Hollow Land."

She grew so pitying as she gazed at his dead face that I began to weep again unreasonably, while she saw not that I was weeping, but looked only on Arnald's face, but after turned on me frowning.

"Unjust! yes, truly unjust enough to take away life and all hope from her; you have done a base cowardly act, you and your brother here, disguise it as you may; you deserve all God's judgments—you——"

But I turned my eyes and wet face to her, and said:

"Do not curse me—there—do not look like Swanhilda: for see now, you said at first that you had been waiting long for me, give me your hand now, for I love you so."

Then she came and knelt by where I sat, and I caught her in my arms, and she prayed to be forgiven.

"O, Florian! I have indeed waited long for you, and when I saw you my heart was filled with joy, but you would neither touch me or speak to me, so that I became almost mad,—forgive me, we will be so happy now. O! do you know this is what I have been waiting for all these years; it made me glad I know, when I was a little baby in my mother's arms, to think I was

born for this ; and afterwards, as I grew up, I used to watch every breath of wind through the beech-boughs, every turn of the silver poplar leaves, thinking it might be you or some news of you."

Then I rose and drew her up with me ; but she knelt again by my brother's side, and kissed him, and said :

"O brother ! the Hollow Land is only second best of the places God has made, for Heaven also is the work of His hand."

Afterwards we dug a deep grave among the beech-roots and there we buried Arnald de Liliis.

And I have never seen him since, scarcely even in dreams ; surely God has had mercy on him, for he was very leal and true and brave ; he loved many men, and was kind and gentle to his friends, neither did he hate any but Swanhilda.

But as for us two, Margaret and me, I cannot tell you concerning our happiness, such things cannot be told ; only this I know, that we abode continually in the Hollow Land until I lost it.

Moreover this I can tell you. Margaret was walking with me, as she often walked near the place where I had first seen her ; presently we came upon a woman sitting, dressed in scarlet and gold raiment, with her head laid down on her knees ; likewise we heard her sobbing.

"Margaret, who is she ? " I said : " I knew not that any dwelt in the Hollow Land but us two only."

She said, " I know not who she is, only sometimes, these many years, I have seen her scarlet robe flaming from far away, amid the quiet green grass : but I was never so near her as this. Florian, I am afraid : let us come away."

FYTTE THE SECOND

Such a horrible grey November day it was, the fog-smell all about, the fog creeping into our very bones.

And I sat there, trying to recollect, at any rate some-

thing, under those fir-trees that I ought to have known so well.

Just think now ; I had lost my best years somewhere ; for I was past the prime of life, my hair and beard were scattered with white, my body was growing weaker, my memory of all things was very faint.

My raiment, purple and scarlet and blue once, was so stained that you could scarce call it any colour, was so tattered that it scarce covered my body, though it seemed once to have fallen in heavy folds to my feet, and still, when I rose to walk, though the miserable November mist lay in great drops upon my bare breast, yet was I obliged to wind my raiment over my arm, it dragged so (wretched, slimy, textureless thing !) in the brown mud.

On my head was a light morion, which pressed on my brow and pained me ; so I put my hand up to take it off ; but when I touched it I stood still in my walk shuddering ; I nearly fell to the earth with shame and sick horror ; for I laid my hand on a lump of slimy earth with worms coiled up in it. I could scarce forbear from shrieking, but breathing such a prayer as I could think of, I raised my hand again and seized it firmly. Worse horror still ! the rust had eaten it into holes, and I gripped my own hair as well as the rotting steel, the sharp edge of which cut into my fingers ; but setting my teeth, gave a great wrench, for I knew that if I let go of it then, no power on the earth or under it could make me touch it again. God be praised ! I tore it off and cast it far from me ; I saw the earth, and the worms and green weeds and sun-begotten slime, whirling out from it radiatingly, as it spun round about.

I was girt with a sword too, the leathern belt of which had shrunk and squeezed my waist : dead leaves had gathered in knots about the buckles of it, the gilded handle was encrusted with clay in many parts, the velvet sheath miserably worn.

But, verily, when I took hold of the hilt, and dreaded lest instead of a sword I should find a serpent in my hand ; lo ! then, I drew out my own true blade and shook it flawless from hilt to point, gleaming white in that mist.

Therefore it sent a thrill-of joy to my heart, to know that there was one friend left me yet : I sheathed it again carefully, and undoing it from my waist, hung it about my neck.

Then catching up my rags in my arms, I drew them up till my legs and feet were altogether clear from them, afterwards folded my arms over my breast, gave a long leap and ran, looking downward, but not giving heed to my way.

Once or twice I fell over stumps of trees, and such-like, for it was a cut-down wood that I was in, but I rose always, though bleeding and confused, and went on still ; sometimes tearing madly through briars and gorse bushes, so that my blood dropped on the dead leaves as I went.

I ran in this way for about an hour ; then I heard a gurgling and splashing of waters ; I gave a great shout and leapt strongly, with shut eyes, and the black water closed over me.

When I rose again, I saw near me a boat with a man in it ; but the shore was far off ; I struck out toward the boat, but my clothes which I had knotted and folded about me, weighed me down terribly.

The man looked at me, and began to paddle toward me with the oar he held in his left hand, having in his right a long, slender spear, barbed like a fish-hook ; perhaps, I thought, it is some fishing spear ; moreover his raiment was of scarlet, with upright stripes of yellow and black all over it.

When my eye caught his, a smile widened his mouth as if some one had made a joke ; but I was beginning to sink, and indeed my head was almost under water just as he came and stood above me, but before it

went quite under, I saw his spear gleam, then *felt* it in my shoulder, and for the present, felt nothing else.

When I woke I was on the bank of that river; the flooded waters went hurrying past me; no boat on them now; from the river the ground went up in gentle slopes till it grew a great hill, and there, on that hill-top,—Yes, I might forget many things, almost everything, but not that, not the old castle of my fathers up among the hills, its towers blackened now and shattered, yet still no enemy's banner waved from it.

So I said I would go and die there; and at this thought I drew my sword, which yet hung about my neck, and shook it in the air till the true steel quivered; then began to pace toward the castle. I was quite naked, no rag about me; I took no heed of that, only thanking God that my sword was left, and so toiled up the hill. I entered the castle soon by the outer court; I knew the way so well, that I did not lift my eyes from the ground, but walked on over the lowered drawbridge through the unguarded gates, and stood in the great hall at last—my father's hall—as bare of everything but my sword as when I came into the world fifty years before: I had as little clothes, as little wealth, less memory and thought, I verily believe, than then.

So I lifted up my eyes and gazed; no glass in the windows, no hangings on the walls; the vaulting yet held good throughout, but seemed to be going; the mortar had fallen out from between the stones, and grass and fern grew in the joints; the marble pavement was in some places gone, and water stood about in puddles, though one scarce knew how it had got there.

No hangings on the walls—no; yet, strange to say, instead of them, the walls blazed from end to end with scarlet paintings, only striped across with green damp-marks in many places, some falling bodily from the wall, the plaster hanging down with the fading colour on it.

In all of them, except for the shadows and the faces of the figures, there was scarce any colour but scarlet

and yellow ; here and there it seemed the painter, whoever it was, had tried to make his trees or his grass green, but it would not do ; some ghastly thoughts must have filled his head, for all the green went presently into yellow, out-sweeping through the picture dismally. But the faces were painted to the very life, or it seemed so ;—there were only five of them, however, that were very marked or came much in the foreground ; and four of these I knew well, though I did not then remember the names of those that had borne them. They were Red Harald, Swanhilda, Arnald, and myself. The fifth I did not know ; it was a woman's, and very beautiful.

Then I saw that in some parts a small penthouse roof had been built over the paintings, to keep them from the weather. Near one of these stood a man painting, clothed in red, with stripes of yellow and black : then I knew that it was the same man who had saved me from drowning by spearing me through the shoulder ; so I went up to him, and saw furthermore that he was girt with a heavy sword.

He turned round when he saw me coming, and asked me fiercely what I did there.

I asked why he was painting in my castle.

Thereupon, with that same grim smile widening his mouth as heretofore, he said, "I paint God's judgments."

And as he spoke, he rattled the sword in his scabbard ; but I said, "Well, then, you paint them very badly. Listen ; I know God's judgments much better than you do. See now ; I will teach you God's judgments, and you shall teach me painting."

While I spoke he still rattled his sword, and when I had done, shut his right eye tight, screwing his nose on one side ; then said :

"You have got no clothes on, and may go to the devil ! What do *you* know about God's judgments ?"

"Well, they are not all yellow and red, at all events ; you ought to know better."

He screamed out, "O you fool! yellow and red! Gold and blood, what do they make?"

"Well," I said; "what?"

"HELL!" And, coming close up to me, he struck me with his open hand in the face, so that the colour with which his hand was smeared was dabbed about my face. The blow almost threw me down; and, while I staggered, he rushed at me furiously with his sword. Perhaps it was good for me that I had got no clothes on; for, being utterly unencumbered, I leapt this way and that, and avoided his fierce, eager strokes till I could collect myself somewhat; while he had a heavy scarlet cloak on that trailed on the ground, and which he often trod on, so that he stumbled.

He very nearly slew me during the first few minutes, for it was not strange that, together with other matters, I should have forgotten the art of fence: but yet, as I went on, and sometimes bounded about the hall under the whizzing of his sword, as he rested sometimes, leaning on it, as the point sometimes touched my bare flesh, nay, once as the whole sword fell flatlings on my head and made my eyes start out, I remembered the old joy that I used to have, and the *swy, swy*, of the sharp edge, as one gazed between one's horse's ears; moreover, at last, one fierce swift stroke, just touching me below the throat, tore up the skin all down my body, and fell heavy on my thigh, so that I drew my breath in and turned white; then first, as I swung my sword round my head, our blades met, oh! to hear that *tchink* again! and I felt the notch my sword made in his, and swung out at him; but he guarded it and returned on me; I guarded right and left, and grew warm, and opened my mouth to shout, but knew not what to say; and our sword points fell on the floor together: then, when we had panted awhile, I wiped from my face the blood that had been dashed over it, shook my sword and cut at him, then we spun round and round in a mad waltz to the measured music of our meeting swords,

and sometimes either wounded the other somewhat, but not much, till I beat down his sword on to his head, that he fell grovelling, but not cut through. Verily, thereupon my lips opened mightily with "Mary rings."

Then, when he had gotten to his feet, I went at him again, he staggering back, guarding wildly; I cut at his head; he put his sword up confusedly, so I fitted both hands to my hilt, and smote him mightily under the arm: then his shriek mingled with my shout, made a strange sound together; he rolled over and over, dead, as I thought.

I walked about the hall in great exultation at first, striking my sword point on the floor every now and then, till I grew faint with loss of blood; then I went to my enemy and stripped off some of his clothes to bind up my wounds withal; afterwards I found in a corner bread and wine, and I eat and drank thereof.

Then I went back to him, and looked, and a thought struck me, and I took some of his paints and brushes, and kneeling down, painted his face thus, with stripes of yellow and red, crossing each other at right angles; and in each of the squares so made I put a spot of black, after the manner of the painted letters in the prayer-books and romances when they are ornamented.

So I stood back as painters use, folded my arms, and admired my own handiwork. Yet there struck me as being something so utterly doleful in the man's white face, and the blood running all about him, and washing off the stains of paint from his face and hands, and splashed clothes, that my heart misgave me, and I hoped that he was not dead; I took some water from a vessel he had been using for his painting, and, kneeling, washed his face.

Was it some resemblance to my father's dead face, which I had seen when I was young, that made me pity him? I laid my hand upon his heart, and felt it beating feebly; so I lifted him up gently, and carried him towards a heap of straw that he seemed used to lie upon;

there I stripped him and looked to his wounds, and used leech-craft, the memory of which God gave me for this purpose, I suppose, and within seven days I found that he would not die.

Afterwards, as I wandered about the castle, I came to a room in one of the upper stories, that had still the roof on, and windows in it with painted glass, and there I found green raiment and swords and armour, and I clothed myself.

So when he got well I asked him what his name was, and he me, and we both of us said, "truly I know not." Then said I, "but we must call each other some name, even as men call days."

"Call me Swerker," he said, "some priest I knew once had that name."

"And me Wulf," said I, "though wherefore I know not."

Then he said: "Wulf, I will teach you painting now, come and learn."

Then I tried to learn painting till I thought I should die, but at last learned it through very much pain and grief.

And, as the years went on and we grew old and grey, we painted purple pictures and green ones instead of the scarlet and yellow, so that the walls looked altered, and always we painted God's judgments.

And we would sit in the sunset and watch them with the golden light changing them, as we yet hoped God would change both us and our works.

Often too we would sit outside the walls and look at the trees and sky, and the ways of the few men and women we saw; therefrom sometimes befell adventures.

Once there went past a great funeral of some king going to his own country, not as he had hoped to go, but stiff and colourless, spices filling up the place of his heart.

And first went by very many knights, with long

bright hauberks on, that fell down before their knees as they rode, and they all had tilting-helms on with the same crest, so that their faces were quite hidden : and this crest was two hands clasped together tightly as though they were the hands of one praying forgiveness from the one he loves best ; and the crest was wrought in gold.

Moreover, they had on over their hauberks surcoats which were half scarlet and half purple, strewn about with golden stars.

Also long lances, that had forked knights'-pennons, half purple and half scarlet, strewn with golden stars.

And these went by with no sound but the fall of their horse-hoofs.

And they went slowly, so slowly that we counted them all, five thousand five hundred and fifty-five.

There went by many fair maidens whose hair was loose and yellow, and who were all clad in green raiment ungirded, and shod with golden shoes.

These also we counted, being five hundred ; moreover some of the outermost of them, viz., one maiden to every twenty, had long silver trumpets, which they swung out to right and left, blowing them, and their sound was very sad.

Then many priests, and bishops, and abbots, who wore white albs and golden copes over them ; and they all sung together mournfully, "*Propter amnen Babylonis ;*" and these were three hundred.

After that came a great knot of the Lords, who wore tilting helmets and surcoats emblazoned with each one his own device ; only each had in his hand a small staff two feet long whereon was a pennon of scarlet and purple. These also were three hundred.

And in the midst of these was a great car hung down to the ground with purple, drawn by grey horses whose trappings were half scarlet, half purple.

And on this car lay the King, whose head and hands were bare ; and he had on him a surcoat, half purple and half scarlet, strewn with golden stars.

And his head rested on a tilting helmet, whose crest was the hands of one praying passionately for forgiveness.

But his own hands lay by his side as if he had just fallen asleep. And all about the car were little banners, half purple and half scarlet, strewn with golden stars.

Then the King, who counted but as one, went by also.

And after him came again many maidens clad in ungirt white raiment strewn with scarlet flowers, and their hair was loose and yellow and their feet bare : and, except for the falling of their feet and the rustle of the wind through their raiment, they went past quite silently. These also were five hundred.

Then lastly came many young knights with long bright hauberks falling over their knees as they rode, and surcoats, half scarlet and half purple, strewn with golden stars ; they bore long lances with forked pennons which were half purple, half scarlet, strewn with golden stars ; their heads and their hands were bare, but they bore shields, each one of them, which were of bright steel wrought cunningly in the midst with that bearing of the two hands of one who prays for forgiveness ; which was done in gold. These were but five hundred.

Then they all went by winding up and up the hill roads, and, when the last of them had departed out of our sight, we put down our heads and wept, and I said, " Sing us one of the songs of the Hollow Land."

Then he whom I had called Swerker put his hand into his bosom, and slowly drew out a long, long tress of black hair, and laid it on his knee and smoothed it, weeping on it : So then I left him there and went and armed myself, and brought armour for him.

And then came back to him and threw the armour down so that it clanged, and said :

" O ! Harald, let us go ! "

He did not seem surprised that I called him by the right name, but rose and armed himself, and then he looked a good knight ; so we set forth.

And in a turn of the long road we came suddenly

upon a most fair woman, clothed in scarlet, who sat and sobbed, holding her face between her hands, and her hair was very black.

And when Harald saw her, he stood and gazed at her for long through the bars of his helmet, then suddenly turned, and said :

"Florian, I must stop here ; do you go on to the Hollow Land. Farewell."

"Farewell." And then I went on, never turning back, and him I never saw more.

And so I went on, quite lonely, but happy, till I had reached the Hollow Land.

Into which I let myself down most carefully, by the jutting rocks and bushes and strange trailing flowers, and there lay down and fell asleep.

FYTTE THE THIRD

And I was waked by some one singing ; I felt very happy ; I felt young again ; I had fair delicate raiment on, my sword was gone, and my armour ; I tried to think where I was, and could not for my happiness ; I tried to listen to the words of the song. Nothing, only an old echo in my ears, only all manner of strange scenes from my wretched past life before my eyes in a dim, far-off manner : then at last, slowly, without effort, I heard what she sang.

"Christ keep the Hollow Land
All the summer-tide ;
Still we cannot understand
Where the waters glide ;

Only dimly seeing them
Coldly slipping through
Many green-lipped cavern mouths,
Where the hills are blue."

"Then," she said, "come now and look for it, love,
a hollow city in the Hollow Land."

I kissed Margaret, and we went.

Through the golden streets under the purple shadows of the houses we went, and the slow fanning backward and forward of the many-coloured banners cooled us : we two alone ; there was no one with us, no soul will ever be able to tell what we said, how we looked.

At last we came to a fair palace, cloistered off in the old time, before the city grew golden from the din and hubbub of traffic ; those who dwelt there in the old ungolden times had had their own joys, their own sorrows, apart from the joys and sorrows of the multitude : so, in like manner, was it now cloistered off from the eager leaning and brotherhood of the golden dwellings : so now it had its own gaiety, its own solemnity, apart from theirs ; unchanged, unchangeable, were its marble walls, whatever else changed about it.

We stopped before the gates and trembled, and clasped each other closer ; for there among the marble leafage and tendrils that were round and under and over the archway that held the golden valves, were wrought two figures of a man and woman, winged and garlanded, whose raiment flashed with stars ; and their faces were like faces we had seen or half seen in some dream long and long and long ago, so that we trembled with awe and delight ; and I turned, and seeing Margaret, saw that her face was that face seen or half-seen long and long and long ago ; and in the shining of her eyes I saw that other face, seen in that way and no other long and long and long ago—my face.

And then we walked together toward the golden gates, and opened them, and no man gainsaid us.

And before us lay a great space of flowers.